Learning and Skills Council

Local Strategic Plan 2002-05

Milton Keynes, Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire

Learning+Skills Council
Milton Keynes, Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire

The Vision

"To ensure this local Learning and Skills
Council is at the forefront of collaborative,
exemplary provision of relevant learning
opportunities within the area in order to
realise the full potential of our people and to
maintain and raise economic performance."

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Milton Keynes, Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire

> Chairman's foreword

This local Learning and Skills Council (LSC) started operation in March 2001. The first few months were spent establishing the organisation and planning the way forward and the local LSC team is to be congratulated on its success in doing so without causing any reduction in service to either our customers - the individuals living in and around the area - or to our stakeholders.

Now the time has come to look to the future and so we have prepared this, our Strategic Plan, which sets out our objectives for the period 2002 to 2005. Like any plan for the future, we cannot predict every eventuality and so the Plan will be reviewed and revised on an annual basis.

This Plan has been produced by our Executive team with significant input from the Council members in setting priorities for action. However, we also need to build on the views of the stakeholders and we look forward to receiving your feedback.

Both the Executive team and the Council Members recognise that we have more to do to move the Strategy forward and that is why we have established four Working Groups. These will each examine specific priority areas:

- **disadvantaged people**
- **quality**
- **working with employers**
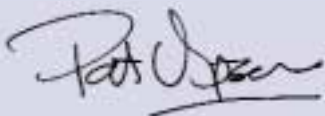- **models of provision**

With these Working Groups, which will include expert input from key stakeholders, we expect to test our strategic approach, and review and improve for the future.

The Learning and Skills Council is committed to raising the standards of learning and training in the Milton Keynes, Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire area in order to meet the best interests of our customers, and in a way that will be supported by our stakeholders.

To fulfil our commitment, we need to understand the issues which lead to people in our community being disengaged, and find better ways of re-engaging them. We want to raise the standards at the Basic Skills level (i.e. in literacy and numeracy). We would like to reach employers and work with them to help raise the skill levels of their employees. And underlying all of this is our commitment to our Raising Standards and Equal Opportunities programmes.

Moving forward with the Strategic Plan will be a major challenge for us within the Council, and I hope that you will all help us to get the long term strategy right. We cannot succeed in our aim of improving the standards in our area unless we also have the confidence and commitment of our stakeholders and, most of all, unless we have the confidence of our customers.

We look forward to working with you in building this confidence, and in providing the opportunity for everyone in our area to achieve their goals.

Pat Upson, Chairman,
Learning and Skills Council Milton Keynes, Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire
May 2002

> Introduction

In March 2001, the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) took over the functions previously run by the Training and Enterprise Councils (TECs) and the Further Education Funding Council (FEFC).

The LSC has also assumed responsibility for the funding of adult and community learning and (from 2002) shares responsibility with Local Education Authorities and schools' governing bodies for school sixth forms. The LSC is consequently responsible for the planning and funding of all post-16 education and training (apart from Higher Education).

In November 2000 the LSC Remit Letter from the Secretary of State explained the LSC's role in the funding and planning of post-16 learning. Government policy (including the White Paper *Schools - Achieving Success*, September 2001) since then has extended this in some respects for 14-year olds. Reference is made to both age categories as appropriate.

The Milton Keynes, Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire Learning and Skills Council is one of 47 local offices of the government's national Learning and Skills Council, and each carries responsibility for local learning provision.

Planning learning effectively requires robust, comprehensive local knowledge. At this Learning and Skills Council, we intend to serve the needs of local employers and individuals by matching learning opportunities to proven demand for learning from both employers and individuals. It is the effective delivery of this service upon which we will be judged.

This document is a Strategic Plan for the Milton Keynes, Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire region. It will place the aims and vision for this Learning and Skills Council in the context of both the economic and social characteristics of our local economy and the priorities for the National Learning and Skills Council (as set out in the Government's *Learning to Succeed* White Paper published in 2000).

The Aim of Our Strategy

The successful delivery of our strategy will have a major impact upon the Milton Keynes, Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire area in terms of participation, attainment and competitiveness. These aims will need to be achieved if the area is to remain as one of the key drivers of the South East economy, and for the people of this area to be empowered, via learning opportunities, to fulfil their potential. We will focus on the needs of the learner, and put the learner at the heart of all we do. We will aim to achieve a positive change in attitudes towards learning across the area. We will strive to underpin these objectives with a step-change in the quality of provision, a firm commitment to equality for all, and a real desire to work more closely with our partners and stakeholders. Only by these means will we be able to maximise the impact that we can have upon this area.

Our local targets for 2004 for participation and attainment reflect national priorities which are equally of relevance in Milton Keynes, Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire. In addition to these, we will be looking to effect real changes on the local area by addressing local needs and priorities through a selection of innovative approaches. These will include:

- Understanding the local economy.
- Raising young people's qualification attainment.
- Minimising exclusion from the labour market.
- Reducing levels of under-employment.
- Reducing the number of non-learners.
- Encouraging businesses to plan for human resource development.
- Raising the volume of training.
- Increasing skills levels in management.

We believe that our strategy presents a demanding agenda for the local LSC and for our partners. It is the role of our partners to deliver the targets that have been set, and it is our task to empower them to ensure that they are capable of meeting the challenge. It is our joint responsibility to ensure that the strategy achieves a successful outcome – a result that is vital if we are to make a real and positive difference to this area.

Working in Partnership

This Learning and Skills Council will only be able to achieve its objectives by working in partnership and co-operation with all relevant agencies and organisations. A key element of our planning process was therefore to consult as widely as possible in order to ensure not only that the priorities of this area are addressed, but also to ensure a good fit with the Plans of our Partners for maximum impact.

Consultation Process

A robust consultation process was developed to achieve these objectives, the main components of which are outlined below:

Outline Timetable

Jul 2001	– Council awayday to develop first draft of Strategic Plan
Oct 2001	– Draft Plan printed
Oct 2001/Jan 2002	– External Consultation including consultation meetings
Jan 2002/Feb 2002	– Feedback from Consultation incorporated into revised Plan
Mar 2002	– revised Plan approved by Council
May 2002	– Plan published

External consultation involved the distribution of 1140 copies of the Draft Strategic Plan to the following stakeholders:

- Learning Partnerships
- Council members
- Basic Skills at Work campaign
- Careers Service
- Councillors (Chair and Leaders)
- Education Business Partnerships
- Economic Partnerships
- Economic Development Officers
- Further Education principals
- South East England Development Agency
- Government Office for the South East
- Higher Education & Development Partners
- Employers
- Learning Providers
- MEPs
- MPs
- Local Press
- Secondary Schools
- Voluntary organisations

Another 1410 copies of the Plan were circulated via meetings, conferences and sundry requests.

In addition, a number of consultation events were held. These were as follows:

Consultation Launch:

Oxford: Holiday Inn, Fri 19th Oct 2001

Further consultation meetings:

Banbury: Cherwell District Council, Mon 26th Nov 2001
Milton Keynes: Milton Keynes College, Wed 28th Nov 2001
High Wycombe: Wycombe District Council, Thur 29th Nov 2001
Oxford: Holiday Inn, Fri 7th December 2001

A number of staff and Council members also gave strategy presentations to various stakeholder groups and organisations.

We would particularly like to thank all those individuals and organisations who helped assist us with the re-drafting of the Plan, either by contributing at one of the consultation events or by responding formally to the consultation.

Overview of Local LSC Strategic Plan

This Plan weaves together the different elements driving an environment in which individuals have both the appetite and the opportunity to learn.

The Local Area

The LSC is a national organisation with 47 local offices, of which Milton Keynes, Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire is one.

Milton Keynes, Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire LSC was formed by the amalgamation of:

- The Training and Enterprise Council component of the Milton Keynes Chamber of Commerce, Training & Enterprise
- Heart of England Training and Enterprise Council
- part of Thames Valley Enterprise
- part of the regional Further Education Funding Council Office

The local LSC recognises the extent and quality of work that has been carried out in the area to date and wishes to build on good practice and lessons learned. The 'we' referred to throughout this document refers to the LSC nationally and locally but we know that we are dependent on Partner support in turning aspiration into reality.

The local LSC has developed a memorandum of understanding, or a 'Partnership Agreement', with a number of organisations, such as the Employment Service, ConneXions, and Local Learning Partnerships, with which it works. These agreements are public documents and are available on request.

The local LSC will emphasise diversity and choice and create a culture of learning which excites individuals and employers alike about the benefits of learning throughout life. All of our policies, strategies and programmes will reflect our commitment to equal opportunities. Policy will be driven by need - this, in turn, drawn from extensive local information and knowledge. The demography and economy of the area is the subject of **Chapter 1** and **Chapter 2** focuses on the local profile of learners and provision.

A more detailed analysis of the data, which provide the basis for these two chapters, is available in Sections 1 and 2 of the *Supporting Information* pages in part B of this document.

Local Priorities and National Objectives

As a national organisation with local offices, the LSC is in a position to harmonise the approach to post-16 learning throughout England. The benefits of this approach will be felt locally as a more coherent and transparent system for learning. However, consistency of approach does not mean uniformity of practice - each local area will have its own character and needs.

All local LSCs throughout the country are working towards the National LSC's five key tasks, as set out in the Secretary of State's remit letter of 9 November 2000:

1. To raise participation and achievement by young people.

2. To increase demand for learning by adults, and to equalise opportunities through better access to learning.

3. To engage employers in improving skills for employability and national competitiveness.

4. To raise the quality of education and training delivery.

5. To improve effectiveness and efficiency.

These objectives will be measured against ambitious and extended National Learning Targets. Each local office will set its own priorities and goals in order to meet these targets. The local LSC will also be working closely with SEEDA (the South East England Development Agency) to assist with the achievement of its Tier 2[1] outcome targets. National, regional and local priorities are outlined in **Chapter 3.**

Local LSC Strategies

In order to meet the needs of local learners and fulfil its commitment to national objectives, this LSC has devised three cornerstones to its overall strategy:

1. The **Participation Strategy** described in **Chapter 4** outlines how this LSC will reach out to learners to try to provide everyone with the desire and capability to learn.

2. The **Skills Strategy** described in **Chapter 5** focuses on the local workforce. This section outlines how this LSC will work locally with employers and other groups in order to raise the skills level of individuals throughout their working lives.

3. The **Learner Strategy** described in **Chapter 6** addresses the infrastructure of learning. This section outlines how this LSC will work locally with providers of education in a way which puts the learner at the heart of the process.

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1   Tier 2: regional outcomes that each Regional Development Agency (RDA) must work with partners to achieve. The definition of these outcomes is the same for all RDAs and flow from the Public Service Agreements between the Treasury and individual Government departments. They are outcomes for the region to deliver, not just SEEDA.

Additional Cross-Cutting Themes

The three strategies described above provide a powerful local interpretation of the National LSC vision to 'raise participation and attainment through high quality education and training which puts learners first'.

In addition, this local LSC has specific projects which spotlight distinct local circumstances. By using local interpretation of mainstream activities and running specialised local projects, the local LSC can ensure that a truly local solution is developed.

Some of these local projects include research projects designed to inform future developments. Some will be experimental to test innovative approaches to the challenges set out in the national targets and local priorities. These additional activities are outlined in **Chapter 7**.

Measuring Success

The local LSC has to make sure that aspirations are translated into reality and that progress can be measured. This will be done by means of 'Local Impact Measures' described in **Chapter 8**. It is against these Local Impact Measures that our success will be measured.

Inclusion and Equal Opportunities

The Inclusion and Equal Opportunities Strategy, which underlies all the activities described in the plan, is described in **Chapter 9**.

Raising Standards

A key challenge for this LSC is to maintain and drive up quality of provision, and although the responsibility mainly rests with the provider network, this LSC will play a major role in setting standards, identifying needs and gaps, and enabling continuous improvement. Our strategy to achieve this is detailed in **Chapter 10**.

Health and Safety

This LSC will encourage learning providers to ensure that 'Learner Safety' is inextricably linked to all programmes of delivery. Our approach to Health and Safety is outlined in **Chapter 11**.

Supporting Information

This Strategic Plan is founded on data and developments which have informed the progress of the LSC to date. For ease of reading and reference, the Plan is divided into two parts, A and B.

- PART A: The **Strategic Plan** outlines the objectives and activities of the Milton Keynes, Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire LSC.

- PART B: The **Supporting Information** section covers:

    Section 1: Demographic details of the area
    Section 2: A profile of provision and a profile of learners
    Section 3: A profile of the Local Council Members

Monitoring and Evaluation

The Strategic Plan will be monitored on a quarterly basis by our Executive Team and Council to ensure that our key objectives are achieved. The evaluation process will be informed by a wide range of statistical and management information.

Evaluation will take into account not only whether the actions have been completed successfully, or are on target to achieve longer-term objectives, but also whether they have had the desired impact upon the areas in which we operate. Central to the evaluation of our activities will be consideration of Quality and Equal Opportunities issues.

The evaluation process will also allow us to re-prioritise resources where necessary, and to review and address any areas which may be under-performing.

We will evaluate the effectiveness of our Plan as part of the consultation process with our stakeholders and partners on an annual rolling basis, and this feedback will then be incorporated into future Plans. We will ensure that progress against the Plan is communicated and available to the public for scrutiny.

The Strategic Plan will inform the annual Business Plan which will include more detailed activities. The Business Plan will also be subject to a rigorous monitoring and evaluation process.

> 1 Economic and Demographic Information

Economic and Demographic Trends

Economic Profile

The Milton Keynes, Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire area is one of the key drivers of the South East of England in terms of Gross Domestic Product (GDP), and accounts for 17% of the regional total. Based on per head figures, the three component parts of the area are all above the regional average. The performance of Milton Keynes, in particular, is one of the best in the South East.

It is vital to the economy, not only of this area but of the region as a whole, that the area continues to grow and prosper and maintain or improve upon its competitiveness.

Demographic Profile and Change

Our area contains 16% of the total population of the South East. Nearly 15% of the local population are of school age (5-15), and 17% are over the age of 50, (slightly below the national average).

For those in the labour force, figures show that Milton Keynes has a younger-than-average working population and Buckinghamshire has an older profile. Overall, the population of the area is predicted to rise by 7% over the next 10 years.

Demographic change must be planned for to ensure that the needs of individuals can be accommodated and that the needs of businesses can be met with a highly skilled and highly motivated workforce.

Rural and Urban Deprivation

Whilst the area is often described as prosperous and as one which enjoys high levels of productivity and employment, it should not be overlooked that these overall indicators can sometimes mask pockets of deprivation which exist within even the most successful economies.

Tackling some of the major causes of deprivation in both urban environments (where there are pockets of high unemployment and low skill levels) and rural environments (which may lack access to education and training) must be a key driver for the local LSC in order to ensure that opportunities are available to everyone. The LSC recognises that it cannot alleviate all causes of deprivation on its own but will seek to intervene wherever appropriate and where such causes fall within its remit.

Employer Profile

There are approximately 67,200 employer sites within the area (18% of the South East total).

The area is slightly more reliant upon the service sector[2] than is the case nationally and less reliant upon agricultural and manufacturing organisations.

The local LSC must be sensitive to fluctuations in all sectors that are important to this economy.

Changes in technology (particularly in IT) and in traditional employment hierarchies are demanding new and different requirements for skills within businesses. Managerial and professional jobs account for almost half of all local jobs, and skills provision needs to be tailored appropriately.

Economic Activity

Economic activity rates in the area are well above the UK figure. Whilst this is positive from the perspective of local individuals contributing towards the economy, it is a constraining factor for businesses trying to access new labour - available skilled and even unskilled workers are hard to find.

Full-time jobs are prevalent in Milton Keynes whereas Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire tend to have a comparatively larger share of part-time jobs.

Unemployment lies at exceptionally low levels in the area. Those classified as 'Claimant Count' unemployed amount to around 1.1% of the workforce.

Skills Issues and Their Impact Upon Businesses

One of the consequences of high economic activity and low unemployment in the area is that businesses cannot always find a source for the workforce they need.

Employers in this area, across most business sectors, report a high proportion of recruitment difficulties. There are a variety of reasons for this which include uncompetitive conditions or salaries, skill shortages and/or skill gaps.

Potential solutions available to employers include accessing other sources of labour (such as women returners and the early retired) or 'upskilling' the existing workforce.

Recent surveys suggest that a large proportion of companies do not effectively plan their human resources which may result in a failure to maximise the potential of individuals within their organisations. Encouraging businesses to plan better is, therefore, another possible solution.

2   Businesses other than those involved in agriculture, primary and construction

Future Structural Change

Forecasts predict a further shift towards service industry sector jobs and higher order occupations (professional and management roles). Jobs in the distribution, transport and hotel-related sectors, as well as in the business services sector (banking, finance, insurance etc.), are likely to show increases above the national average.

Manufacturing jobs are expected to decline, although the loss will probably be less marked here than elsewhere in the UK. Recent research has suggested that parts of manufacturing in this area are likely to benefit from the further development of 'clusters[3]', particularly high technology based clusters such as biotechnology or IT.

In occupational terms, most job sectors are expected to grow but much of the highest growth will be in management and professional jobs.

Managing the changes in occupational needs must be at the heart of any strategy designed to build upon the success of the area and this underpins our Strategic Plan.

Transport

It is vital to ensure that local residents have the right skills to access rewarding local employment, and that businesses can access the right people locally so minimising the need to source skills from elsewhere.

About 14% of residents work outside of the area as a whole. Oxfordshire is a relatively self-contained labour market, whereas residents of Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes are more likely to be employed outside of their respective areas.

Travel to work by car, with its obvious consequences for congestion and pollution, is the mode of travel to work for 7 out of 10 local workers, with only a minority opting for the train, bus, cycle, or walking.

It is important to ensure that, not only are opportunities for employment made easily available to all residents, but also sources of learning are made easily available, so that prospective learners can both maximise their skills and find work within their locality as far as possible.

3   A geographical concentration of interconnected companies, suppliers, firms in related industries
    and associated institutions.

> 2   Profile of Learners and Provision

Profile of Learners

School Performance in the area

Key Stage 4 National Target 1 - for 16-year-olds to achieve 5 high grade GCSEs/GNVQs

The Key Stage 4 National Target 1 requires that 50% of 16 year olds achieve 5 high grade (A*-C) GCSEs (or GNVQ equivalent).

Oxfordshire has 55.5% of 16 year-olds getting 5 high grade results. Buckinghamshire has 64.3% and Milton Keynes 42%.

There is clearly a wide variance in performance between different parts of the local LSC area in terms of the proportion of individuals achieving 5 or more GCSE at A*-C.

There is also a difference in gender achievement - girls achieve better results at GCSE across the area than boys.

At individual teaching institution level, the variations are much greater, with some achieving 100% on this measure while the lowest ranking school in this area achieved just 18% (in 2001).

Key Stage 4 National Target 2 - for 16 year olds to achieve at least 1 GCSE/GNVQ

The Key Stage 4 National Target 2 dictates that 95% of 16 year olds should achieve at least 1 GCSE (or GNVQ equivalent). Oxfordshire has 94.3% of 16 year-olds achieving this result. Buckinghamshire has 95.8% and Milton Keynes has 93.5%.

The range in performance by institution is smaller than that for Target 1, with some schools achieving 100% whilst others achieved 81% (2001).

16 and 17 year-olds - Participation

Participation rates in full and part-time education have fallen over the last five years, partly in response to greater job opportunities.

For 16 year olds, Milton Keynes is of greatest concern here, with participation rates well below regional and national averages. In spite of the change in its geography, Buckinghamshire's participation rate was the same in 1998/99 as it had been in 1994/95, showing no improvement by the end of this five-year period. Oxfordshire's rate showed a consistent downward trend during the same time, in line with the regional trend.

Milton Keynes has the lowest rates in the South East region for participation in education by 17 year olds. Oxfordshire's and Buckinghamshire's participation rates are above average for both the region and country as a whole and have increased in contrast to the national trend.

In terms of destinations of school leavers, figures for the year 1998/99 show that 77.5% of Year 11s in Buckinghamshire went on to full time education, 66.9% in Milton Keynes and 67% in Oxfordshire.

GCE 'A' Levels, AS, AGNVQ, VCE Average Point Score Per Entry

The performance by students in Milton Keynes on this measure gives particular cause for concern, as the score is below the average for England.

Buckinghamshire and Oxfordshire are both above the national average, and are ranked 3rd and 6th nationally in terms of Learning Partnership areas.

Without a continued supply of higher skilled and educated young people across the whole of the area, Milton Keynes, Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire may be unable to maintain its competitive advantage.

Adult Basic Skills

Literacy

Around one in five of the working population in Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire have been identified as having literacy difficulties; in Milton Keynes the figure is as high as almost one in four[4].

Numeracy

Almost one in four of the working population in Milton Keynes has difficulties with numeracy, compared with one in five in Oxfordshire, and less than one in six in Buckinghamshire[5].

Deficiencies in these Basic Skills need to be addressed for several reasons. Poor Basic Skills may result in a lack of self-esteem and confidence in the individual. They limit the kind of job a poorly skilled worker can get, resulting in their being unable to break out of a poor-paying job, or even to find employment at all. Upskilling will help minimise social exclusion and deprivation. And it is vital to upskill people so that employers can source high quality labour from within our existing local workforce.

4   Basic Skills Agency.
5   Basic Skills Agency.

Overall Workforce Qualification and Learning Attainment

The local workforce is, in general, a highly skilled one and both Adult National Learning Target 1 for 2002 (50% of the adult population with NVQ Level 3 or equivalent) and Adult National Learning Target 2 for 2002 (28% of the adult population with NVQ Level 4 or equivalent) have already been achieved.

Whilst the achievement of the 2002 Adult National Learning Targets in the area is a significant milestone, there are clearly some parts of the local workforce (in geographic, working status and occupational terms) where attainment is well below the standards set by the National Learning Targets. Not only should these parts of the workforce be directly addressed, but it is also important that efforts are made to continually improve and set new, challenging targets for the area to ensure that the workforce remains amongst the most highly skilled in the South East.

Current Study and Training Activity (Adults)

About one in ten of the workforce are currently studying for a qualification but the numbers are less for those that are self-employed.

Training and studying within the workforce is essential to the continued success and competitiveness of businesses within the area. Whilst it is clear that there is much that is being undertaken, there is no room for complacency. Yet there are certain parts of the workforce for whom training does not appear to be of prime importance (e.g. those working part-time and the less qualified). More than 6% of the workforce claim never to have trained.

Motivation to Learn

In a recent survey, it was found that more than three quarters of the area's workforce are "positive" or "very positive" about future training, with increases in personal knowledge and personal satisfaction being factors which would encourage further training or study. Of concern is the finding that almost one in five said that "nothing" would encourage them to train.

Minimising the barriers to training will have a clear impact upon the numbers in training and studying. However, much needs to be done to accentuate the positive benefits of training, particularly among the older members of the workforce, the less qualified and the self-employed.

Access to Information Technology (IT)

The majority of the workforce have access to a computer at work. Two thirds of those also have access to a computer at home. Almost half of the unemployed do not use a computer, although this is less than the regional figure.

IT is fast becoming an integral part of every job, and the lack of access to IT and/or the lack of knowledge in how to use computers is a real disadvantage in the workplace. It is again the socially excluded and the unemployed who have the most need yet are the ones least likely to have access to IT.

> 3　National and Local Priorities

National Vision

The long-term vision of the National Learning and Skills Council is:

> **To raise participation and attainment through high quality education and training which puts learners first.**
>
> **Our vision is that, by 2010, young people and adults in England will have knowledge and productive skills matching the best in the world.**

If, by 2010, this country is to be amongst the world leaders in education, training and lifelong learning, best practice must be measured elsewhere, benchmarked against our own current performance and a framework established to deliver excellence over a sustained period.

To realise these higher levels of achievement it will not be enough simply to improve what is on offer through publicly supported systems and to hope that it is taken up. Nor will it be enough to show that better skills levels are in the wider national interest, or in the interests of the economy or of a given industry. Individual employers need to be convinced that systematic engagement in training and developing the workforce will raise their own productivity and competitiveness. Equally, individual adults and young people need to be convinced that learning is exciting, life enhancing and worthwhile.

National and Local Targets

A few clearly defined targets will serve as the principal benchmarks for progress over the next three years.

There is an initial basis for targets of this kind in the shape of the National Learning Targets adopted by the Government in 1998. The Learning and Skills Council has been charged with advising on the extension of post-16 targets beyond 2002.

The following targets for 2002-2004 set out the challenge for this LSC. Further targets for 2006 and 2010 will evolve through consultation.

In our local area, these five targets will be achieved in the context of our own economy, geography and current levels of participation and attainment in learning activities.

National and Local Targets 2002 - 2004

Key Objectives	National	Local	
	Targets for 2004	Current Position (2000)	Targets for 2004
Extend participation in education, learning and training.	80% of 16-18 year olds in structured learning	78.6% (38,667)	82.5% (43,477) of 16-18 year olds in structured learning
	Set baseline and target for adults in next year's plan	n/a	Set baseline and target for adults in next year's plan
Increase engagement of employers in workforce development.	Develop measure of employer engagement in next year's plan	n/a	Develop measure of employer engagement in next year's plan
Raise achievement of young people.	85% at NVQ Level 2 by age 19	83.2% (13,348)	90.3% (14,486) at NVQ Level 2 by age 19
	55% at NVQ Level 3 by age 19	54.6% (8,756)	60.4% (9,682) at NVQ Level 3 by age 19
Raise achievement of adults.	Raise literacy and numeracy skills of 750,000 adults	0	Raise literacy and numeracy skills of 18,874 adults
	% of adults at NVQ Level 2: targets to be set in next year's plan	n/a	% of adults at NVQ Level 2: targets to be set in next year's plan
	52% of adults at NVQ Level 3	58.8% (361,000)	66.8% (410,040) of adults at NVQ Level 3
Raise quality of education and training user satisfaction.	Set baselines and targets in next year's plan	n/a	Set baselines and targets in next year's plan

The Learning and Skills Council in Milton Keynes, Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire recognises that its agenda can only be achieved if a partnership approach between the LSC and other relevant organisations (such as the Employment Service, ConneXions, Local Learning Partnerships, and other key partners) is genuinely embraced.

The Learning and Skills Councils in the South East have identified six common areas that will be taken forward as key regional priorities. The LSCs will work closely with regional partners to progress these priorities and to ensure that there is cohesion and synergy to planning and delivery.

In taking these priorities forward the LSCs are committed to ensuring that equality and diversity will underpin every aspect of the LSC's work, and that e-learning will form a key component in developing solutions that are responsive to the needs of the learner and employer.

1 Research and Intelligence

- Develop a coherent partnership approach to research, encompassing LSC sub-regional and regional partnerships exploiting both top-down and bottom-up approaches.
- Develop a consistent regional approach to definitions and measurements including common additional targets.

2 Marketing of Learning and Skills to Individuals and Employers

- Develop a regional marketing strategy, aimed at both learners and employers, that is agreed and shared by key regional partners including IAG, ConneXions, and SEEDA.
- Set up a regional group of key partners to develop the strategy, agree roles, and take forward the implementation.

3 Basic Skills

- Develop a regional strategy for the delivery of Basic Skills working closely with key regional partners.
- Capture and apply local area best practise across the region.

4 Retention and Achievement of Young People

- Develop an entitlement for all young people aged 14 - 19 in the South East.

5 Adult Development for the Workplace

- Develop joint regional approaches to workforce development exploiting the added value that partnership working will bring.
- Take forward a South East Workforce Development Project that will identify the key trigger points for engaging with employers.

6 Provider Capacity

- Develop provider excellence through working closely with regional partners in the development of specialist provision, including CoVEs, specialist schools and NTIs.
- To raise provider quality through co-ordinated regional action and sharing of best practise.

The local LSC will also work in partnership with SEEDA to achieve the goals set out in the Framework for Regional Employment and Skills Action (FRESA). This is the way in which key regional partners will develop and deliver an agreed plan to address the skills and employment needs of employers and individuals within the region.

In addition to the above targets, extensive audits conducted across the Milton Keynes, Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire economies reveal that there are areas of under-achievement and imbalances in skills provision which impact on local area competitiveness and social inclusion. These findings, detailed in Chapters 1 and 2, have resulted in the identification of the following eight key priorities for our area:

1. **Understand the local economy.** We need to understand the make-up of the area, including factors such as concentrations of skill shortage, over or under supply of workers, learner motivation, and deprivation in the urban and rural areas, in order to ensure the effective deployment of this LSC's services in the areas where it is most needed.

2 **Raise young people's qualification attainment.** Despite impressive learning resources and a working population that is amongst the most highly skilled nationally, the area is under-performing in young people's achievement (e.g. Year II Achievement Rates in Milton Keynes). We must understand the reasons for this and develop effective ways to promote learning and raise young people's attainment.

3 **Minimise exclusion from the labour market.** It is important to ensure that all those excluded from the labour market have the opportunity to join it. This is particularly important for our area which already boasts high economic activity rates and near full employment. Specific groups are particularly affected by exclusion, such as the long-term unemployed, women returners, some ethnic minorities and the early retired. This must be addressed.

4 **Reduce levels of under-employment.** Unemployment is low in the area, so we must maximise the skills of those already in work. This is essential if we are to reduce recruitment difficulties and fill skill gaps that are now widespread in our area. Raising the skill level of those in work will also help reduce job turnover, encourage a 'self-contained' labour market, and raise individual self-esteem.

5 **Reduce the number of non-learners.** Evidence from surveys shows that those who are least qualified are much less likely to undertake learning in the future, or to be motivated by its benefits. This occurs despite a falling demand for unskilled occupations, and even in the face of clear evidence that low qualifications equate to low incomes. We must find ways of motivating individuals to learn and to make the most of their potential.

6 **Encourage businesses to plan for human resource development.** Recent surveys tell us that many employers, particularly Small to Medium Enterprises (SMEs), do not effectively use systematic human resource planning or structured training. This LSC will encourage businesses to be proactive in developing initiatives that help them effectively plan for, and respond to, economic change. This will help them address future recruitment difficulties and skill shortages.

7 **Raise the volume of training.** Despite the growing need for better skills in one of the most successful economies in the South East, the volume of training activity undertaken in the area is little better than the national average - and has remained static over the last five years. This LSC must facilitate the use of resources more effectively, particularly noting that much employer-based training is unsystematic.

8 **Increase skill levels in management.** Management is one of the critical areas of local skill shortage. Technological improvements, amongst others, have led to a 'flattening' of organisational structures, where the role formerly fulfilled by middle-management has now been divested to those at the front-line, e.g. those in customer-facing roles. The skills of decision-making, team management and self-management are now not exclusively the remit of those with 'manager' in their job titles, but often that of more 'junior' employees who have been given increased responsibility. It is vital that those involved in all aspects of management are given the training and skills they need to improve their own, and their organisations', prospects.

In order to meet the area's local needs and fulfil its commitment to our Equal Opportunities Strategy and the National LSC vision, the local LSC has devised three cornerstones to its overall strategy which are described in the following three chapters.

> 4   Participation Strategy

Aim of the Participation Strategy

With our Local Participation Strategy, we aim to put the individual at the heart of the provision of post-14 learning. We want to enable more young people and adults to benefit from learning which is appropriate to them, which enhances their quality of life and which is relevant to their employment. Through innovation and inspiration, and by strongly promoting the benefits of learning, we must excite individuals to want to learn and to take part in creating their own learning communities (defined either by geography and/or by common interests).

All young people and adults ought to be able to access high quality learning from an effective delivery structure. We will continue to support existing high quality learning provision and extend and develop new provision that is responsive to the needs of learners and employers for both the academic and vocational (i.e. work-Based Learning) routes. If we are to achieve this goal it is essential that we work in partnership with key partners (such as providers, Employment Service, ConneXions, Learning Partnerships, Local Education Authorities, voluntary and community organisations and others).

We recognise that there are barriers to learning for some individuals. These may include a lack of basic education or money, family and childcare responsibilities, work commitments, travel difficulties as well as those relating to cultural and peer group differences. Through research and through working with our partners, we hope to better understand these issues and to look at ways in which we can improve access to learning. This in turn will help us to develop and plan appropriate learning opportunities throughout the area.

We realise that if we are to make a difference we cannot work in isolation. We need to evaluate and build on the learning offer currently available and ensure that the individual, and the employer, drive the continued development and quality of local provision. Our goal is to ensure that we contribute to the personal and economic success of all people living in Milton Keynes Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire.

Below we have outlined four objectives within our Participation Strategy.

Objective 1

To stimulate the demand for learning.

Meeting the Local Priority to:	Meeting the National Objective to:
• Reduce the number of non-learners	• Extend participation in education, learning and training • Increase demand for learning

If widening participation in learning is to succeed, people must feel excited about learning as individuals, within the family, and as communities. The voice of the individual should drive the continued development of the content and quality of local provision.

In addition, there will be effective marketing and promotion of the benefits of learning as well as a culture which celebrates achievement.

More people will be brought into, and retained in, learning by improving access to high quality, impartial and appropriate information, advice and guidance and by working with existing community groups to ensure that they are informed about the provision available. The value of learning to the individual and wider society needs to be fully appreciated. Appropriate and relevant support must be given to young people and adults to enable them to become lifelong learners. To that end, we are working closely with the recently formed ConneXions service (which provides support to all 13-19 year olds) and with the Information, Advice and Guidance Partnerships (who provide an adult service, for people aged 20-plus). We are working with both parties to ensure support and a clear progression route is available for all.

Objective 2

To ensure more young people and adults achieve in high quality learning which meets their needs.

Meeting the Local Priority to:	Meeting the National Objective to:
• Raise young people's qualification and attainment	• Raise achievement levels of young people • Raise the achievement of adults • Raise the quality of education and training user satisfaction

Raising levels of participation and attainment by young people is a key strategic objective for us. Without a continued supply of highly skilled young people, this area is unlikely to be able to maintain its competitive advantage. We need to recognise and value the work already being undertaken by our providers and continue to support them to deliver high quality local provision. Developing links between schools, colleges, work-based learning providers, higher education institutions and employers is crucial if we are to encourage all young people to stay in learning until they are at least 19. We will work to support emerging Government policy which aims to dilute the vocational/academic divide and attempts to develop a more coherent approach to education provision for 14-19 year olds. We will also need to work with Government to find appropriate ways of acknowledging achievement other than purely qualification-based measures.

We already enjoy a positive and constructive relationship with Education Business Link Organisations in the area. We will build on this work to prepare young people to enter the workplace equipped with the appropriate skills and experience to meet employer needs and drive strong economic performance.

We value the nature and diversity of the provision already in place in particular the adult and community learning provided by Local Education Authorities which is effective in attracting and engaging new learners in a variety of settings. We are currently working with the LEAs to help develop their plans to meet the needs of our area and to help access funds in order to meet the growing demand for learning. Nationally, Adult and Community Learning accounts for approximately 20% of all LSC contracted training.

There is also an urgent need to develop the workforce by supporting more adults into learning so that they are able to contribute effectively, and by improving market research to encourage providers to create new provision which reflects the needs of learners and employers.

Objective 3

To act as a champion for equality of access, with particular emphasis on those communities and groups which are disengaged from learning.

Meeting the Local Priority to:	Meeting the National Objective to:
• Minimise exclusion from the labour market	• Equalise opportunities through better access to learning

Over 20% of the working population in Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire has been identified as having literacy and numeracy difficulties. Whilst the local workforce as a whole has met the National Learning Targets for NVQs, women and part-time workers have not. 14% of members of black and minority ethnic communities have no qualifications compared with 13% of whites.

Providing support for individuals is crucial in order to build a more cohesive society and help those who are currently under-represented. Work will take place with communities (both geographic and those that share a common interest) where individuals experience significant problems, and provision will be targeted at those who may be disadvantaged by race, gender, age, disability or geography. Patterns of low participation and achievement will be identified. Accessibility, retention and achievement will be improved through partnership working, building on the work developed and currently undertaken by organisations such as the Employment Service, ConneXions, Local Learning Partnerships and other key partners.

Additional costs involved in working with disadvantaged groups will be incurred but these are vital to ensure equality of opportunity and outcome are at the core of the planning, delivery and evaluation of all post-16 learning provision.

We are committed to working proactively with our partners to develop our strategy for inclusion and equal opportunities. In order to fulfil this aim, it is imperative that we fully engage the voluntary and community sector. We value the role this sector plays in its work with a wide variety of clients and in particular its ability to effectively articulate the needs of the non-learner. We are keen to understand how we can work together to ensure the voluntary and community sector play their part as key partners with us in helping individuals access learning.

Objective 4

To ensure that learners are offered a broad range of opportunities that meet their needs and promote progression to further learning.

Meeting the Local Priority to:	Meeting the National Objective to:
• Reduce levels of under-employment	• Increase engagement of employers in workforce development

We must ensure that the skills of those already in work are maximised - this is vital to reduce recruitment difficulties and skills gaps that are now widespread. Individuals must increasingly be able to choose when and how they learn, and new technologies must be applied to enable learners to experience the type and level of learning to suit them and their circumstances.

Building on this premise, we have developed a strong partnership with the local LearnDirect hub, which supports the development of the Milton Keynes, Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire infrastructure and delivery of LearnDirect products and services. This enables learners to access both information on learning options and learning solutions, including on-line solutions.

Individuals need to be motivated to learn and employers encouraged to appreciate the benefit of investing in their workforce, particularly older workers, the lower qualified and the self-employed.

The development of learning should be diverse in nature and delivered by a range of providers who are able to respond to the needs of local communities (defined by geography and/or by common interest) and individuals. The learning provider network must be developed to enable voluntary and community groups to access mainstream funding.

Narrowly based qualifications which emphasise the academic route do much to discourage those learners who prefer to apply their learning to work-based and real-life situations. It is important, therefore, that the benefits of Modern Apprenticeships are clearly promoted and that they are valued to the same extent as the more established academic qualifications.

> 5   Skills Strategy

Aim of the Skills Strategy

The primary aim of the Skills Strategy is to meet the local economic and social needs of the local LSC area through development of the actual and potential workforce. It will also seek to incorporate appropriate ideas and objectives outlined in the Performance and Innovation Unit report on workforce development[6].

To do this, we will need to build long-term relationships with all types of local employers and employer representative bodies, working with them to define skill needs and develop workforces, and to encourage demand for appropriate Work-Based Learning.

We will strive to ensure equality of opportunity across the workplace and seek to challenge inequalities, such as the low economic activity rates among black and minority ethnic communities.

Close links with education providers is also important to ensure we maximise future provision.

The Skills Strategy will build on the existing partnerships and networks and will encompass work in key generic and sector-specific skill areas. Our partners here will include the South East England Development Agency (SEEDA), National Training Organisations (NTOs)/Sector Skills Councils (SSCs), the Small Business Service, Trade Unions, ConneXions, and other trade groups and bodies.

Below, we have outlined four objectives within the Skills Strategy.

Objective 1

To work with partners to develop a local Skills Strategy that reflects agreed local needs and priorities.

Meeting the Local Priority to:	Meeting the National Objective to:
• Minimise exclusion from the labour market • Reduce levels of under-employment • Encourage businesses to plan for human resources development • Raise the volume of training • Increase skill levels in management	• Extend participation in education, learning and training • Increase engagement of employers in workforce development

To ensure the local Skills Strategy is recognised by all partners as truly representative of the area's major skills challenges, it will be critical to both:

6   'In Demand : An Adult Workforce Development Strategy for the 21st Century', Performance and Innovation Unit, 2001

1. Continually improve the quality and availability of labour market intelligence; and

2. Consult widely

This continuous and evolving process has already highlighted some of the key challenges. These include skill and labour shortages and the fact that one in five adults in the local area have no NVQ equivalence.

Objective 2

To work with key partners to ensure relevance and coherence of all delivery mechanisms.

Meeting the Local Priority to:	Meeting the National Objective to:
• Raise young people's qualification attainment • Reduce levels of under-employment • Raise the volume of training • Understand the local economy	• Extend participation in education, learning and training • Raise achievement of young people • Raise achievement of adults • Raise quality of education and training and user satisfaction

We must ensure that the provision delivered and procured through local LSC funds is driven by identified needs of employers and learners. We will need to influence the delivery and focus of other products and services available to employers. This will assist in our goal of making the local workforce as highly skilled and competitive as possible.

To achieve this objective, the key priorities identified in Chapter 3 will be addressed in the following ways:

Skills Shortages

More than a third of all local organisations report that a shortage of suitable people is a business concern. One in four identify a lack of skills in the workforce. As this impacts upon the area's ability to remain competitive, this LSC will take a lead role in influencing future learning provision.

Labour Shortages (current and projected)

It is predicted that there will be a further shift towards service industry sector jobs and higher level occupations. Management and professional occupations are expected to grow at around three times the rate of unskilled and customer service occupations. The local LSC will take responsibility for careful forward planning of learning provision, inviting innovative bids for additional resources and collaborative projects.

Deprivation concentrations

Whilst the local area can be viewed as successful in economic terms when considered as a whole, this obscures specific areas of deprivation. To fulfil the potential of the whole area, deprivation and the causes of deprivation must be addressed. This LSC will intervene, wherever appropriate to our role, to alleviate deprivation within our area - the upskilling of our workforce will address one of the main causes of this issue.

Underachievement

The sustained competitiveness of the area depends on a good source of new labour from our schools. We will work to actively promote apprenticeships to reduce the numbers of young people entering work without training.

Underemployment

We must maximise the skills of those already in employment in order to help reduce recruitment difficulties and fill skills gaps. The local LSC will work with employers to upskill workforces and promote the benefits to employers of a highly-skilled, highly-motivated workforce which can be achieved through training.

Improved Human Resources Planning by Employers

In response to the problem of businesses not systematically planning their human resources and training activity, this LSC will encourage local companies to review all aspects of their Human Resources practices and will facilitate participation in the Investors in People programme (which promotes employee training and development). Thus businesses should be offered potential solutions to their skills shortages.

Re-engaging Non-learners

Evidence from recent surveys shows that the least qualified are much less likely to undertake learning and this is increasingly polarising the workforce into 'qualifieds' and 'non-qualifieds'. The local LSC will facilitate opportunities for all non-learners which will help resolve skills shortages.

Objective 3

Identify and work with priority sectors to develop and implement innovative approaches to meeting agreed skills needs.

Meeting the Local Priority to:

- Reduce levels of under-employment
- Encourage businesses to plan for human resources development
- Raise the volume of training
- Increase skill levels in management
- Raise achievement of adults

Meeting the National Objective to:

- Extend participation in education, learning and training
- Increase engagement of employers in workforce development
- Raise achievement of young people

Early analysis of available intelligence, and consultation meetings with new and existing LSC Partners, and in particular National Training Organisations, have highlighted the following priority areas on which the local LSC will focus its actions:

Sectoral

- Construction
- Care
- Health
- Education
- Logistics
- Research and Development
- Motor Industry and Allied
- Media and Creative
- Voluntary Organisations

Generic

- ICT
- Management
- Basic Skills
- Customer Service

Other areas

Other areas which have been identified as being important for future focus are:

- Leisure
- Landbased and Tourism
- ICT (sector)

Most of the sectoral areas listed above have common short- and medium-term issues based around skill or labour shortages, high job turnover, and skills gaps, as well as being areas with vital knock-on effects for other industries and supply chains.

The other areas have been chosen for their specific local area concentrations and specialisations, with potential for growth and re-investment - but are all subject to intensifying competition.

In addition, there is a vital need for improvement in the generic skills identified across all sectors.

In order to maximise impact upon the areas chosen, we have concentrated our resources on these sectoral and generic areas. However, it is acknowledged that there are other key sectors with which we need to become involved, and this is recognised in the areas for future work.

Objective 4:

To increase overall volume and commitment levels of employers and employees to workforce development.

Meeting the Local Priority to:	Meeting the National Objective to:
• Reduce levels of under-employment • Encourage businesses to plan for human resources development • Raise the volume of training	• Extend participation in education, learning and training • Increase engagement of employers in workforce development

The benefits an employer can achieve through continued professional development (CPD) include a highly-motivated, skilled and efficient workforce. The benefits of CPD to an employee include job satisfaction and career development opportunities.

The benefits of CPD and learning will be publicised by this LSC and partners and those achieving significant outcomes will be celebrated. This approach will encourage further involvement by employers to develop their workforce.

Survey findings suggest that a significant number of employers in our area do not have systems in place for staff appraisal or review, nor do they operate structured training policies. Business attitudes will need to be changed to achieve an increase in the quantity and quality of training to develop a highly skilled workforce which maximises the competitiveness of our local economy, and which provides equality of opportunity to all.

This LSC will not be able to achieve improvement with this objective on its own and will rely heavily on existing - and new - relationships and partnerships to make progress. Our contractual relationship with the local Small Business Service franchise will be particularly important in engaging new and dispersed SMEs.

An initial focus on the achievement of the National Learning Targets set to December 2002 will be both necessary and inevitable, but other Local Impact Measures will be developed.

> 6 Learning Strategy

Aim of the Learning Strategy

The aim of this Learning Strategy is to increase and improve the existing learning provision so that it is responsive to the needs of all learners, meets the economic demands of the area and is underpinned by our commitment to equality and inclusion.

In order to encourage individuals to commit to learning, the learning opportunities themselves must be exciting, innovative, delivered at the right pace and easily accessible. We must be able to understand why some people do not take up learning opportunities and what the barriers are. We must also be able to clearly promote the benefits of learning to both the individual and to employers.

There should be up to date information and guidance about these learning opportunities, clearly stating progression routes and opportunities for further development. This is essential for all learners but particularly so for young people who need to clearly understand their progression routes through mainstream education, work based learning and further/higher education. The partnership between ourselves and ConneXions will be vital in the development of comprehensive information, advice and guidance for young people.

The Milton Keynes, Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire area has a strong local economy with a competitive and rapidly changing labour market. Recent economic success, however, has brought with it high levels of skill shortages and increasing skill gaps (where employers have sufficient staff but with the wrong or insufficient skill levels). In order to help meet the skills gaps and maintain this buoyant economy, learning provision must be tailored to specific employer and individual requirements - one size does not fit all anymore.

In partnership with a number of key organisations, such as schools, learning partnerships, learning providers, employers, local authorities, ConneXions, Sector Skills Councils, and others, the local LSC will create an infrastructure that develops flexible and responsive learning provision. Economic needs, as well as the goal of social inclusion, must be the driving force behind this development. Funding mechanisms and delivery systems must be designed to support increased access to learning and to remove potential barriers, not create them.

Objective 1

To ensure learning provision is planned and developed to meet both the labour market and individual learner needs.

Meeting the Local Priority to:

- Understand the local economy
- Minimise exclusion from the labour market
- Reduce levels of under-employment
- Reduce the number of non-learners

Meeting the National Objective to:

- Extend participation in education, learning and training
- Increase engagement of employers in workforce development

The review and development of our partners' strategic plans will form the critical elements in devising our own overall local plan for learning provision. These plans must be in line with national and local priorities, and they should be based on current information and the use of effective performance and quality management benchmarking data.

We will need to work closely with our existing partners including the Local Learning Partnerships, ConneXions, Learning Providers for both young people and adults, Local Authorities, and many others, to ensure there is a collaborative approach to planning. Our strategic plans must be complementary with no duplication of activity and no gaps in provision. It is also imperative that we involve the learners themselves, wherever possible, in the development of provision.

Objective 2

To develop a learning infrastructure that offers high quality provision matching the best in the UK.

Meeting the Local Priority to:	Meeting the National Objective to:
• Raise young people's qualification attainment • Minimise exclusion from the labour market • Reduce levels of under-employment • Reduce the number of non-learners • Raise the volume of training	• Extend participation in education, learning and training • Raise achievement of young people • Raise achievement of adults • Raise quality of education and training user satisfaction

By working in partnership with our learning providers, we can develop provision that is based on best practise and continually strive to raise standards.

The continued professional development of all learning provider staff, tutors, lecturers and teachers, is a fundamental part of a high quality and effective learning infrastructure, and will be an important element of this learning strategy.

A key factor will be the establishment of professional training qualifications and the setting of agreed delivery standards.

Centres of Excellence will also be a priority in the continued development of high quality education and learning.

Objective 3

To ensure the learning provision infrastructure does not exclude and works to positively include all sectors of the community.

Meeting the Local Priority to:

- Understand the local economy
- Minimise exclusion from the labour market
- Reduce levels of under-employment
- Reduce the number of non-learners
- Raise the volume of training

Meeting the National Objective to:

- Extend participation in education, learning and training

The development of innovative and creative learning opportunities that widen choice and remove barriers will be encouraged. We will work with key agencies, partners, voluntary and community groups to extend the range and variety of learning locations. Provision will be developed and extended to ensure that learning is an integral part of local community activity.

It is important to recognise that not all learning has to take place in a formal or regulated framework, that not all learning leads to specific qualifications or qualifications at all, and that learning can be undertaken through social and community activities.

> 7   Additional Cross-Cutting Themes

Additional activities will be undertaken to meet the specific needs of the area. These activities will address five cross-cutting themes, or objectives, and will complement the work described in the three cornerstones to the overall strategy outlined earlier.

The social and economic make-up of the Milton Keynes, Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire area reflects great diversity. Qualification levels are amongst the highest in the South East, particularly at graduate level, with up to 35% of the workforce qualified to NVQ level 4, and 50% of the workforce qualified to NVQ level 3 or above. Conversely, however, 14% of school leavers still have no qualifications and up to 7% of the population have serious Basic Skills needs. Within a generally affluent area there are considerable pockets of deprivation and there is clear evidence of polarisation occurring in some areas between the 'learning rich' and the 'learning poor'.

Additionally, there is clear evidence from the most recent employer surveys of the need to tackle increasing local skills shortages.

From the outset the LSC will, therefore, work within the wider community to achieve the following locally specific aims and objectives.

Aim for Additional Local Activities

Within an overall aim of achieving equality of opportunity and increasing the number of people taking part in lifelong learning, we will work to encourage participation by those individuals currently facing exclusion through social, economic or other circumstances. Additionally we will seek to help those who need to develop their knowledge, skills and understanding to improve their chances of employment in a changing labour market and to address skills shortages.

Objective 1

To extend Basic Skills including Basic Information Technology.

Meeting the Local Priority to:	Meeting the National Objective to:
• Reduce the number of non-learners • Minimise exclusion from the labour market • Reduce levels of under-employment.	• Raise achievement of adults • Extend participation in education learning and training • Increase engagement of employers in workforce development

The area already has a long history of Basic Skills delivery. Within this LSC area there are existing projects and partnerships that have received support from Training Enterprise Councils (TECs), the European Social Fund (ESF), the South East England Development Agency (SEEDA) Fund for Learning and the Basic Skills Agency.

Local Basic Skills practitioners have been instrumental in the development of the Workplace Basic Skills Network and the production and development of Basic Skills Agency approved learning materials. This depth of experience needs to be both harnessed and widened. Despite a need, which is as great as anywhere in either the South East or UK, current activity is limited not only by the constraints of funding, but also by the availability of trained tutors.

Working with LSC Partners, such as ConneXions, Local Learning Partnerships and other key players, will increase capacity to both widen provision (through increased numbers of tutors, innovative delivery methods and cost effective provision) and reach those individuals and communities (defined by geography and/or by common interest) who persistently remain outside the scope of current delivery. In particular, through working closely with SEEDA and other agencies, the participation of employers will be encouraged through the delivery of Workbased Basic Skills.

Objective 2

To extend provision for students with learning difficulties and disabilities and for others with particular learning needs, difficulties and access problems.

Meeting the Local Priority to:	Meeting the National Objective to:
• Minimise exclusion from the labour market • Raise young people's qualification attainment • Reduce levels of under-employment	• Raise achievement of young people • Raise achievement of adults • Extend participation in education learning and training

In addition to the needs of those facing problems with literacy, numeracy and basic IT, there are those with other learning and social difficulties or at risk of exclusion. These include:

- Students with learning difficulties and disabilities.
- Young people with difficulties - the disaffected, offenders, those excluded from mainstream education, and those with exceptional gifts.
- People with restrictions imposed by ethnic or religious culture.
- Lone parents and those needing childcare and dependent care.
- Travellers.
- Refugees and asylum seekers.

This list is not exhaustive, but represents some of those for whom special provision needs to be made available.

The local LSC will seek to work with its partners and those agencies with either a proven track record, or demonstrating the capability to deliver learning appropriate to the needs of these groups. Particular activities to be supported will concentrate on the provision of key social/life skills as well as employment skills, backed by appropriate guidance, support and mentoring.

The aim of this provision will be to encourage progression routes into mainstream learning where appropriate. We will seek to put in place innovative community-based provision.

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Objective 3

To promote e-learning and the use of Information and Communication Technology.
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Meeting the Local Priority to:

• Reduce the number of non-learners
• Increase skills levels in management
• Raise the volume of training
</td><td>

Meeting the National Objective to:

• Extend participation in education learning and training
• Raise achievement of adults
• Increase engagement of employers in workforce development
• Raise quality of education and training user satisfaction
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The potential advantages of e-learning are now well documented (ease of access, learning at an individual's own pace, comparative low cost, less time away from work etc.). However, despite initiatives such as Learndirect and the Capital Modernisation Fund, e-learning take-up is not high and in many parts of the area ICT use and connectivity itself is patchy. Take-up of e-learning and the wider use of ICT within work and the population generally run parallel.

The local LSC will work closely with providers able to offer ICT training focused on the areas of greatest occupational demand. Activities should, wherever possible, include ICT itself as a delivery medium and have the potential to contribute significantly to the ICT connectivity of the area. This will include the development of Broadband and ICT based Learning Centres. Overall, these activities should contribute to and strengthen the infrastructure of ICT based learning being developed through Learndirect and other e-learning initiatives.

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Objective 4

To support Capacity Building for Communities.
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Meeting the Local Priority to:

• Reduce the number of non-learners
• Minimise exclusion from the labour market
• Reduce levels of under-employment
</td><td>

Meeting the National Objective to:

• Raise achievement of adults
• Extend participation in education learning and training
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Whilst this is one of the most affluent areas within the South East there are still recognised areas of significant social and economic deprivation, some (as evidenced by the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions *Indices of Deprivation*) as severe as anywhere in the UK.

In addition to these 'hot spots' of deprivation Buckinghamshire and Oxfordshire are still predominately rural counties. Whilst only 1% of the workforce is now employed in agriculture, 45% of the population live in rural areas and many are affected by rural deprivation. This is a consequence of poor transport, lack of local facilities, and rural isolation.

To address these issues, small (but in terms of their potential impact on local communities significant) projects within both urban and rural communities will be supported as well as within other communities which are defined by factors other than geography. Linking into existing initiatives (such as the New Opportunities Fund and Capital Modernisation Fund) relevant voluntary sector or community based providers will be encouraged to submit proposals via European Social Fund Co-financing to acquire funding for activities designed to create 'Learning Communities'. The aim will be to enable individual small grants (c. £20k-£50k) designed to stimulate learning activity amongst traditional non-learners and those with access problems. They will be aimed at bringing vocational learning to communities in ways that can be tailored to local need and the local work situation. In particular, activities designed to develop links between adult learners and the school community will be encouraged, including mentoring and guidance and encouraging teaching (including Basic Skills tutoring) as a possible career through closer contacts between schools and communities.

Objective 5

To extend training provision.

Meeting the Local Priority to:	Meeting the National Objective to:
• Encourage businesses to plan for human resource development • Raise the volume of training • Increase skills levels in management	• Increase engagement of employers in workforce development • Raise quality of education and training user satisfaction

Learning providers will be encouraged to extend their programmes beyond the existing main government funded provision. They will be encouraged to develop activity that supports Modern Apprenticeship (MAs) and other programmes, but extends provision to those currently not included (such as 19+ for MAs). In particular they will be encouraged to develop innovative provision more closely targeted to the needs of Small to Medium Enterprise (SME) employers. This will include the training of trainers and provision specifically designed to meet local skills shortages. This activity will follow on from work already undertaken locally under European Adapt and Regional Development Agency funded programmes to research and identify SME training needs and develop solutions.

> 8   Local Impact Measures and Actions

The ways in which the local LSC will meet the priorities of the local community and the objectives of the national LSC have been described in the three cornerstones of strategy as well as the additional local activity.

But, words are not enough and the local LSC must be able to report to partners and funders on progress achieved.

Local Impact Measures have been devised for each of the areas of activity described in the preceding chapters, and these are to be further developed in this LSC's Business Plan.

A Local Participation Strategy

Objective	Action	Local Impact Measures
1. To stimulate the demand for learning.	• Identify individuals and groups not currently accessing learning. • Identify barriers to learning. • Prioritise target groups and ways in which barriers to learning can be addressed. • Identify ways of promoting the value of learning. • Implement appropriate mechanisms to stimulate learning.	• More adults and young people in learning. • Those in learning do more of it.
2. To ensure more young people and adults achieve in high quality learning which meets their needs.	• Establish an agreed baseline and definitions of retention and achievement in target groups. • Understand why young people and adults leave learning early; include feedback from learners. • Support providers to work together to offer high quality local provision.	• Increase in participation/ retention and achievement.
3. To act as an ambassador for equality of access, with particular emphasis on those communities and groups which are disengaged from learning.	• Identify target groups - see Skills for Life +. • Understand the issues and challenges faced by target groups. • Seek to address needs of specific groups within boundaries of LSC's responsibilities.. • Seek feedback from target groups to influence learning provision.	• More people in target groups accessing and staying in learning.
4. To ensure that learners are offered a broad range of opportunities that meets their needs, and promotes progression to further learning.	• Ensure a range of appropriate learning opportunities is available and that the learning is appropriate to meet the young person's / adult's needs, i.e. quality, delivery, content. • Implement mechanisms to identify appropriate routes and support young people and adults in achieving full potential.	• Range and quality of local provision increased.

A Local Skills Strategy

Objective	Action	Local Impact Measures
1. To work with partners to produce, deliver and monitor a local skills strategy that reflects agreed local needs and priorities.	• Review labour market intelligence. • Consult widely. • Stimulate demand for education, learning and training.	• Increased engagement of employers in workforce development. • Increased participation in education, learning, and training. • Increased skill levels in priority areas and sectors.
2. To work with key partners to ensure relevance and coherence of all delivery mechanisms.	• Identify and consult with key partners. • Identify local skills needs. • Prioritise needs. • Improve communication of available provision and support. • Ensure the needs of employers are captured through adequate channels of communication.	• Provision is matched to need. • Improved user satisfaction. • Increased take-up of development opportunities. • Improved generic skills within organisations.
3. To identify and work with priority sectors to develop and implement innovative approaches to meeting agreed skills needs.	• Identify and understand key sectors. • Prioritise target sectors. • Work collaboratively with NTOs/SSCs. • Improve communication of available provision and and support. • Ensure the needs of employers and employees are captured through adequate channels of communication.	• Provision is tailored to need. • Increased skills in priority groups. • Improved user satisfaction.
4. To increase overall volume and commitment levels of employers and employees to workforce development.	• Stimulate demand for learning. • Encourage improved workforce development planning. • Engage new employers in developing their workforce. • Increase levels of participation of employers who are already involved.	• Increase in new employers involved in workforce development. • Involvement of existing employers extended. • Improved workforce development planning.

A Local Learning Strategy

Objective	Action	Local Impact Measures
1. To ensure learning provision is planned and developed to meet both the labour market and individual learner needs.	• Identify the needs of the learners and the needs of the marketplace in conjunction with our partners and learning providers. • Review the needs against the existing supply. • Fill the gaps by extending existing provision or developing new provision. • Develop specialist occupational/sector provision if required. • Work in partnership with agencies such as ConneXions to promote information and advice about the learning opportunities available.	• Increased levels of participation. • Increased levels of retention. • Increased achievement rates.
2. To develop a learning infrastructure that offers high quality provision matching the best in the UK.	• Identify weaknesses in existing provision through benchmarking, OFSTED, ALI inspections, self-assessment processes and the Provider Review Process. • Further develop the quality of learning provision through the Provider Review Process and the Self-Assessment and Development Planning Process. • Develop and establish Centres of Excellence.	• Increased levels of participation. • Increased levels of retention. • Increased achievement rates. • Improved inspection rates. • Improved grades in the Provider Review Process. • CoVEs established.
3. To ensure the learning provision infrastructure works to positively include all sectors of the community.	• Identify in partnership with key agencies and community groups under-represented and excluded individuals and communities. • Research the barriers that prevent new learners from utilising existing provision. • Work in partnership with the learning providers to develop new, accessible and creative provision.	• Increased levels of participation. • Increased levels of retention. • Increased achievement rates. • Improved inspection and Provider Review Process grades for equality and diversity.

Additional Cross-Cutting Themes

Objective	Action	Local Impact Measures
1. **Extend Basic Skills provision.** a) Increase the number and type of Basic Skills provider. Encourage work-based Basic Skills and the involvement of employees and their representatives, and employers as both sponsors and deliverers. b) Support the recruitment and training of additional Basic Skills tutors, particularly in areas suffering deprivation.	• Support new projects and develop a comprehensive network of Basic Skills provision across the area. • Increase numbers and widen the range of Basic Skills providers. • Increase the availability of work-based Basic Skills programmes by recruiting both large employers and SMEs to take part. • Increase significantly the number of training places for Basic Skills tutors.	• Reduction in the number of young people and adults with Basic Skills needs.
2. **Extended provision for those with particular needs.** a) Identify those groups with particular learning needs or barriers. b) Develop provision designed to address their needs.	• Research conducted and comprehensive information available about both need and the take-up of learning within groups who have particular learning needs. • Increased access to special learning provision. • Increased participation from groups facing particular access problems and other barriers.	• Publish strategy for inclusion of learners with particular needs. • Increase in number of students with particular needs accessing provision in MKOB area.
3. **Promote e-learning and the use of ICT.** Create an e-learning network to promote the development of both ICT-based learning and ICT connectivity.	• Promote greater use of ICT and provision of e-learning by providers through the creation of an e-learning provider network. • Increase take-up of e-learning by individuals by developing new ICT-based learning modules. • Increase acceptance of the advantages of e-learning by employers, particularly SMEs. • Greater general ICT use and connectivity, including Internet.	• Increase in number of e-learning opportunities available. • Increase in the participation of e-learning.
4. **Support capacity building within communities.**	• Improve local provision of learning in disadvantaged areas by supporting new community-based providers. • Widen range of both organisations and locations providing learning. Create new learning opportunities in MKOB's 'worst wards'. • Increase participation in learning by those communities facing disadvantage.	• Strategy for inclusion of community-based providers in funding mechanism. • Increase in number of community-based organisations accessing LLSC funds.
5. **Extend training provision.**	• Create a range of additional training provision, closely targeted to the needs of local SME employers. • Increased take-up of learning within the SME community; encourage SMEs to take advantage of targeted provision. • Measurable reduction in skills shortages and skills gaps.	• Increased engagement of employers in workforce development.

> 9   Inclusion and Equal Opportunities Strategy

April 2001 – March 2004

Executive Summary

It is a statutory requirement of the Learning and Skills Council to create:

A learning society – a society in which everyone can share in the benefits of learning, enabling people to discover new talents, stretching their creativity and widening their opportunities.

The Learning and Skills Council intends:

To give everyone the chance, through education, training and work to realise their full potential and thus build an inclusive and fair society and a competitive economy.

This will be achieved through 'mainstreaming' which is the process of ensuring all policies, strategies and programme developments support equality and diversity.

The LSC aims to ensure that all individuals and groups of people should have equal access to appropriate learning provision regardless of their age, gender, ethnicity, disability, learning difficulties, sexual orientation, marital status, or religion.

Our Equal Opportunities strategy will also address equality for those disadvantaged by issues such as rural isolation, community isolation and by living in areas of deprivation. It will highlight the priorities for closing equality gaps in access, participation, retention and attainment.

The area covered by Milton Keynes, Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire is characterised by high participation and achievement rates, however the economy increasingly demands a consistent supply of well qualified employees. Skill shortages have been a reality for many employers in the area for a number of years and problems with recruiting staff are widely reported.

On an individual basis, many people are employed in roles that do not sufficiently recognise their potential and employers commitment to training and accrediting their staff remains patchy.

Vision and Purpose

The Milton Keynes, Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire LSC intends to take a far-reaching and systematic approach to ensure that the principles of inclusion and equal opportunities run through both its internal and external responsibilities.

This strategy is being developed and disseminated in order to make public our commitment to inclusion and equal opportunities. It ensures that priorities and actions are highlighted and can therefore be monitored and reviewed - and progress made public.

Consultation

The local LSC will work proactively with our partners, providers and formal and informal networks to promote inclusion and equal opportunities through our respective policies.

The Inclusion and Equal Opportunities Strategy will continue to evolve, in consultation with local equality organisations. These include race, gender, physical and learning disabilities and age diversity interests, the voluntary sector and local communities.

We intend to actively engage these organisations within our review process as detailed under priority 2.

Analysis of Current Situation

Most of the information about population is taken from the 1991 census and whilst it is acknowledged that this may have changed significantly in the intervening years, this is still the most reliable data source available to us. This information will be updated on the release of the 2001 census of population statistics.

Ethnicity

Milton Keynes, Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire has a lower proportion of non-white ethnic groups (4.4%) than Great Britain as a whole (4.9%).

Pakistanis are the most significant minority ethnic community (1.1% of the area's population) with Indians accounting for 0.7%, and black Caribbeans for 0.7%.

In the South East, the economic activity rate for whites in 1998 was 83.8% compared with 69.8% for black and minority ethnic communities[7].

In 1999/2000, the economic activity rate for members of black and minority ethnic communities in this area was 60%, one of the lowest in the South East (compared with 72.6% in Kent/Medway)[8]. Members of black and minority ethnic communities are over-represented in unskilled or semi-skilled manual occupations.

In 1998, the International Labour Organisation unemployment rate for members of black and minority ethnic communities was more than double that of the white labour force for both men and women.

7   Labour Force Survey (LFS), Dec 1999 - Mar 2000
8   Labour Force Survey (LFS), Dec 1999 - Mar 2000

Unitary Authority	White	Black Caribbean	Black African	Black Other	Indian	Pakistani	Bangladeshi	Chinese	Other groups	
									Asian	Other
Milton Keynes	94.2	0.9	0.2	0.4	1.6	0.5	0.4	0.4	0.5	0.8
Oxfordshire	96.7	0.4	0.2	0.4	0.5	0.5	0.1	0.3	0.3	0.6
Buckinghamshire	94.9	1.0	0.1	0.3	0.7	1.9	0.1	0.2	0.3	0.6

Table: Resident Population by Ethnic Group (shown as percentages)

Source: 1991 Census

14% of members of black and minority ethnic communities have no qualifications compared with 13% of whites[9]. However, higher proportions of black African, Chinese and Indian men are qualified to degree level or hold higher qualifications than white men.

8.4% of the total population in Wycombe belong to members of black and minority ethnic communities, and 7% in Milton Keynes. In most rural areas, particularly in Oxfordshire, the ethnic population is less than 1%.

The results of the 2001 Census will give us a much more accurate picture when these are released in 2002.

Disability and Long-Term Illness

People with disabilities[10] have much lower economic activity rates than people without disabilities.

Only 64% of people with disabilities in the South East (51% in the UK) were economically active compared to 86% (84% in the UK) of people without disabilities[11].

Unemployment rates for people with disabilities are nearly twice those for people without disabilities in the UK and the duration of unemployment tends to be longer. Part-time working and self-employment are more prevalent among people with disabilities than among those without.

Unitary Authority	% of population
Milton Keynes	9.2
Oxfordshire	9.8
Buckinghamshire	9.0

Table: Residents with limiting long-term illness

Source: 1991 Census

9   Labour Force Survey (LFS), Dec 1999 - Mar 2000
10   People with disabilities or long term limiting illness
11   Labour Force Survey (LFS), Spring 1999

People with disabilities tend to be over-represented in partly skilled and unskilled manual jobs.

Disabled people are more likely to have never trained (25% of those surveyed in Oxfordshire) than the non-disabled (19%)[12].

Students with Learning Difficulties and Disabilities

18.9% of adults in the Milton Keynes, Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire area have no NVQ equivalent qualifications (19.2% in the South East). 32% of those aged 55-64, and 27.2% of those who are unemployed, have no NVQ equivalent qualifications.

Around 20% of the working population in Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire have been identified as having literacy difficulties. In Milton Keynes the figure is 24%. For numeracy the figures range from 24% in Milton Keynes to 20% in Oxfordshire and 15% in Buckinghamshire.

According to the British Dyslexia Association, dyslexia affects around 4% of the population severely, regardless of socio-economic status, race or intelligence level.

There are estimated to be about 8000 pupils in Milton Keynes, Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire with dyslexia and a total of some 4,200 who are severely affected. Data shows that three times as many boys as girls are affected.

The government provides nationally £55m through the Learning and Skills Council for learners with learning difficulties or disabilities. The funding is provided to assure the provision of further education, higher education and life skills/independence support for learners. Learners tend to be between 16 - 25 and learning provision is largely in specialist residential colleges and schools, which provide post-16 provision throughout the UK.

The LSC currently funds over 2,500 places nationally, 61 of which are students from Milton Keynes, Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire.

Anecdotal evidence suggests that there are a number of young people who have additional needs, not all of whom have been officially statemented.

There are 29 special schools in Milton Keynes, Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire - 14 in Oxfordshire; 11 in Buckinghamshire; and 4 in Milton Keynes.

12 Oxfordshire Skills Audit 2000

Age

Unemployment rates for older workers are generally lower than for younger age groups, although the incidence of long term unemployment is much higher for older workers.

In this area, 20.7% of 16-24 year-olds are on a non-permanent contract compared with 7.6% overall[13].

16% of those aged 55-64 are negative about taking part in future training or study compared with 6% overall and less than 2% of 16-24 year olds[14].

People aged 16-24, and those in the 55-64 age group, are most likely to say that there are no barriers preventing them from undertaking further training or education. However, 1 in 7 people in the older category feel that they are too old to train[15].

Gender

Economic activity rates for women are still lower than those for men but have improved over recent years due to a number of initiatives, as well as many women returning to work as an economic necessity or to maintain careers. Some of the schemes used by employers are flexitime, school term-time working, annualised hours contracts and job-sharing.

	Male	Female	All
Milton Keynes	91.2	81.5	87.1
Oxfordshire	90.1	80.4	85.6
Buckinghamshire	90.1	75.2	83.3
Total	90.3	78.9	85.0

Table: Economic Activity Rate (shown as a percentage of each area's population)

Source: LFS 1999

In Milton Keynes, Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire, 47.9% of women are in full-time employment compared with 70.7% of men[16]. Occupationally, survey evidence shows that males are more likely to work as managers and senior officials and women are more likely to work in administrative and secretarial jobs. Women's pay rates continue to lag some 20% behind those of men.

In Milton Keynes, 21% of families are single parents, 91.5% of whom are female.

About 1 in 4 of the claimant unemployed in the area are female. However, if we take into account people who are unemployed by the International Labour Organisation definition (i.e. would like a job and have looked for work in the last 4 weeks), the female proportion is likely to be much higher.

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13 Milton Keynes, Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire Skills Audit 2001
14 Ibid
15 Ibid
16 Ibid

Women are marginally more positive than men about their own motivation to undertake future training or study, but women are also less qualified than men[17].

	Male	Female	Total
Level 3+ Qualifications	54.3%	48.6%	51.6%
Level 4+ Qualifications	36.0%	30.2%	33.3%

Table: Qualifications levels: achievement of National Learning Targets 1 and 2 by gender

Source: Milton Keynes, Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire Skill Audit 2001

Within certain black and minority ethnic communities the percentage of women with higher level qualifications will be significantly lower.

Women are more likely than men to cite barriers to undertaking further training or education. They are twice as likely to mention the cost of training and four times as likely as men to be hindered by family circumstances and the cost of childcare[18].

Unemployment

Unemployment lies at exceptionally low levels. Those classified as 'claimant count unemployed' amount to 8694 individuals, around 1.1% of the workforce. There are though, pockets of substantially higher unemployment in our area.

Only about 25% of the 'claimant count' are females. In reality, the proportion of female unemployed will be much higher and will include many who have taken early retirement and, of course, potential women returners to the labour market.

Adults who are not claiming benefits and who are not in paid employment

There are also a significant number of people who at any one time may not be working because of a wide range of personal circumstances. It is important to ensure that these groups of people are aware of the training support and advice that is available to help them achieve their potential.

17 Ibid
18 Ibid

Most deprived wards

Whilst many of the statistics at local authority level show our area as having a vibrant, thriving economy with a highly-skilled workforce, this can sometimes mask pockets of deprivation in particular wards within those local authorities. These areas provide real potential for the local LSC to work in partnership with a range of statutory and voluntary agencies to combat disadvantages and raise achievement.

The best description of deprivation at ward level is the Index of Multiple Deprivation 2000, commissioned by the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions (DETR), which uses 33 indicators to understand this issue. These are categorised into the following 6 areas:

- Income
- Employment
- Health and Disability
- Education, Skills and Training
- Housing
- Access to Services

The 10 most deprived wards in the area, according to this overall score, are as follows:

	Ward	Local Authority District
1.	Woughton	Milton Keynes
2.	Blackbird Leys	Oxford
3.	Eaton Manor	Milton Keynes
4.	Littlemore	Oxford
5.	Booker & Castlefield	Wycombe
6.	Neithrop	Cherwell
7.	Fenny Stratford	Milton Keynes
8.	Southcourt	Aylesbury Vale
9.	Meadowcroft	Aylesbury Vale
10.	Berinsfield	South Oxon

Source: Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions

When analysing the results from 5 of the underlying 6 categories[19], a clear pattern emerges showing that many of the above wards score poorly in a number of the categories. Blackbird Leys features in the 10 most deprived wards on all 5 of these categories, and Littlemore, Woughton and Eaton Manor feature amongst the 10 most deprived in 4 of them. The remaining wards, if not within the 10 most deprived, are normally to be found close to the top of the ranking in all 5 of these indicators.

In national terms, Milton Keynes, Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire has ten wards (out of 287) in the worst quartile.

Priority and Target Setting

In line with national LSC policy this LSC has agreed to focus on a small number of priority areas with clear targets for action.

These priorities relate to the LSC's role as an employer, a funding body and an advocate for equality. The final priority addresses the need to report on progress to the National Learning and Skills Council and internally.

Priority one

To become an exemplar of ongoing good practice as an employer and organisation within the Milton Keynes, Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire communities.

During 2001/2004 the local LSC will:

1. Designate the Director of Corporate Services as the member of the senior management team with responsibility for HR and employment.

2. Prepare a written Equal Opportunities Policy, which sets out a commitment to equality.

3. Prepare a plan for implementing the strategy.

4. Secure the commitment of senior management to equality.

5. Communicate the strategy to all new and existing staff and Council members.

6. Train all staff in the requirements of the strategy.

7. Understand and raise awareness of work/life balance issues.

8. Establish an internal Opportunities Advisory Group.

9. Conduct an equality audit of the staffing profile.

10. Ensure that the recruitment and selection processes encourage applications that reflect the breadth and diversity of the local population.

19 Access can be discounted as wards with multiple deprivation tend to be in urban areas and so score well on this particular indicator

11. Commit to achieving the *Investors in People* and *Positive about Disability* standards.

12. Monitor the implementation of the strategy and prepare an annual report on progress for the Council.

Priority two

To develop the Milton Keynes, Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire LSC as an advocate of equality and diversity.

During 2001/2004 the local LSC will:

1. Designate the Chair and the Executive Director as advocates for equality.

2. Designate the Director of External Relations as the co-ordinator of the equality and diversity policy.

3. Ensure that the induction programme for Council Members and staff, and the staff development strategy promote equality and diversity.

4. Communicate the Inclusion and Equal Opportunities Strategy to all staff and stakeholders.

5. Encourage employers to promote equality of opportunity and take positive steps to widen recruitment.

6. Work with ConneXions, local authorities, the Probation Service, and voluntary and community groups to promote equality and diversity.

7. Monitor and review progress on promoting equality and diversity and make recommendations for action as necessary.

Priority three

To embed equality and diversity into all policies, programmes and activities.

During 2001/2004 the local LSC will:

1. Establish a sub group of the local LSC Council Members, chaired by a Member of the Council, and an internal advisory group chaired by a Director, to integrate equality into all policies and plans.

2. Produce management information that allows effective monitoring of participation and achievement, supported by information from provider inspections and quality monitoring.

3. Identify through research and stakeholder consultation across all programme areas, key equality issues and barriers and establish strategies for change at local level.

4. Set equality targets and performance indicators within operational plans to tackle under-representation, under-achievement and stereotyping.

5. Utilise local initiative and external funds to create innovative projects to widen participation and address under achievement.

6. Ensure providers achieve agreed standards, promote equality of opportunity and take positive steps to widen participation.

7. Support the development of a provider good practice network.

8. Benchmark the equality and diversity performance of providers and publish comparative data disaggregated by gender, race, age and disability.

9. Establish a staff development programme for Milton Keynes, Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire LSC staff and training providers, which will provide accredited training in equality and diversity.

Priority four

To report to the Council on progress towards equality.

During 2001/2004 the local LSC will:

1. Consult with partners on the draft Inclusion and Equal Opportunities Strategy and action plan and publish the agreed document.

2. Produce quarterly reports to the senior management team and the 'Opportunities' sub group of the Council.

3. Report annually on progress to the Council - locally and nationally.

Development and Implementation Plan

A detailed implementation plan will be produced. This plan will be our 'working document'.

Responsibilities

Inclusion and equal opportunities run through all functions within all organisations. It is not the responsibility of one person, it is the responsibility of everyone working in an organisation.

The Director of External Relations will have the remit to ensure overall cohesion of the strategy on behalf of Milton Keynes, Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire LSC.

This Strategy has the backing of the local LSC Council Members who are committed to the approach outlined. Council Members are made up of a cross-section of individuals who have a wealth of experience and skills across many disciplines including equal opportunities and social inclusion.

Management Information

In order for progress against equal opportunities targets to be effectively monitored, we need to improve the collection and recording of statistics from providers and partners as well as to develop a robust and accessible management information system.

Management information systems are being established locally to interrogate nationally collected data on achievement and retention in order to inform the planning and performance review processes.

It is also intended to explore the possibility of working with partners to conduct customer satisfaction surveys to ascertain feedback from individual learners. Results from these surveys will be used to improve existing provision and influence future strategy.

Review Process

The Inclusion and Equal Opportunities Strategy will be reviewed internally and externally in September 2002 and then annually.

In contractual terms, providers are reviewed on a quarterly basis and any issues and deficiencies are addressed with any changes incorporated into the overall plan and policies.

The 'Opportunities' Group, which reports directly into the local LSC Council, will review the Strategy and progress against targets on a regular basis.

Nationally the LSC will report annually to the Secretary of State on the progress towards promoting equality that has been made during the year and equality plans for the following year.

External Focus

Overview

Within the local LSC a culture of 'cross-promotion' of inclusion and equal opportunities will be encouraged. When any member of staff is in dialogue with a company or organisation, the subject of inclusion and equal opportunities will be raised when appropriate thereby helping to reinforce the message and integrate the subject further into mainstream provision and activity.

All staff will receive appropriate initial and refresher training to enable them to undertake this role. Staff will act as advocates providing help, support and assistance to develop and sustain positive equality practices with providers, employer and community organisations.

Programme Initiatives

Through statistical evidence detailed earlier in the Strategy, areas for development have been established where it is felt performance can be raised through positive targeting of learners.

Specific plans will be put in place to target such activity.

Equality of opportunity is now embedded in provider contracts. It is a legal requirement on the providers to ensure that an equal opportunities policy is in operation within their own organisation. The local LSC will work with its contractors to ensure that not only are learners and employees aware of their rights and responsibilities but also that providers are working to develop best practice.

Nationally identified targets will be developed locally and fed through to the providers for inclusion in the formal contract. Most providers will be reviewed on a quarterly basis although in some cases providers may be reviewed on a monthly basis.

Through the development of improved management information it is intended to record consistent information on all the 'starts' and 'leavers' on programmes including recording of gender, age and ethnicity.

Intangible 'soft' results, e.g. increased confidence, can sometimes get lost in the overall scheme of the strategy, but are themselves indicative of change. The local LSC will attempt to develop simple but achievable ways of recording this information.

Working with Employers

Both as an employer and in the role as a planning and funding body for post-16 learning, the LSC is strategically placed to promote positive employment practices.

Useful contacts have been made with companies and voluntary organisations through the work of the workforce development team and the promotion of Investors in People.

As well as satisfying statutory requirements, an Inclusion and Equal Opportunities Policy can also support economic prosperity, particularly in areas of low unemployment such as Milton Keynes, Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire, where adherence to such policies encourages staff retention, motivation, loyalty and improves employee performance. Where individuals are not currently employed, companies and organisations that commit to equal opportunities approaches offer a positive encouragement to new staff by welcoming applications from the widest pool of individuals.

Working with Voluntary and Community Organisations

There are a wide range of voluntary and community organisations that the local LSC is keen to develop relationships with in order to work effectively. Voluntary and community groups are often closer to individual learners and as such have developed innovative ways of ensuring their needs are met. It is essential that the local LSC works with these groups and networks.

Working with Partnership Organisations

A number of partnership organisations already exist in the area with similar and overlapping objectives to the local LSC. Examples of such organisations include: Local Learning Partnerships, Information and Adult Guidance groups, ConneXions, and Early Years Partnerships. By working together the local LSC can tap in to existing areas of expertise and established local mechanisms in order to deliver the Strategy successfully.

Working with Statutory Organisations

The local LSC contracts with a range of providers that also hold contracts with other statutory organisations such as the Employment Service and ConneXions. The local LSC will develop an effective liaison network to ensure that effort is not duplicated and issues are not left unresolved.

Internal Focus

The local LSC as an Employer

As a local employer, the Milton Keynes, Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire LSC is committed to being an equal opportunities employer and will:

- Value and welcome diversity.
- Aim to develop all staff to enable them to make a full contribution to meeting our objectives, and to fulfil their own potential on merit.
- Not tolerate harassment or other unfair discrimination on the grounds of sex, marital status, race, colour, nationality, ethnic origin, disability, age, religion or sexual orientation.
- Promote the use of flexible working patterns to enable all staff to balance home and work responsibilities.
- Treat people fairly.
- Ensure that individuals are selected and developed on the basis of their relevant aptitudes, skills and abilities and ensure that they reach their true potential.

Everyone who works for the local LSC has a responsibility to ensure that the organisation's equal opportunities policy is properly observed and complied with. Any breach of the policy will be viewed seriously.

To safeguard individual rights under the policy, any employee who believes they have been treated unfairly may raise the matter through the grievance procedure.

> 10 Raising Standards: Quality and Procedures

Quality Improvement Strategy

Background

The national LSC is committed to making a significant improvement to the provision of post-16 Further Education and Work Based Learning.

Through our 'Raising Standards' Strategy we aim to raise the quality of education and training, and learner satisfaction, working closely in partnership with providers and stakeholders.

A key task for the LSC is to drive up the quality and consistency of standards. Although the system in this country compares well with the best in the world, quality is inconsistent. Evidence from inspections reveals poorly performing or mediocre providers, as well as pockets of poor quality within otherwise satisfactory provision. Quality standards, the satisfaction of 'completers', and achievement levels, must rise. The imperative to improve has been clearly demonstrated by recent national information:

- The Training Standards Inspectorate Report for 2000/2001 shows at least one unsatisfactory grade awarded to 60% of providers at their first inspection during 2000/2001 – 10% higher than the 1998/99 level.
- Colleges of Further Education statistics show that 1 in 4 colleges have an achievement rate for their students of 68% or lower. Some colleges achieve less than 50%. Overall success rates based on retention and achievement are significantly lower than previous years.

To make improvements requires action on many levels and on a continuous long- term basis. The responsibility mainly rests with the provider network. However, the national and local LSCs, including ours, will play a major role by setting standards of excellence, identifying needs and gaps, and enabling continuous improvement of the provision.

Quality Improvement Strategy

These are the key principles and aspirations we must embed:

1   The learner is at the heart of provision so priority must be given to understanding and meeting their needs, and then of their employers.

2   We will make full use of information collated during the periodic 'Provider Reviews' to work towards consistency of standards and identify issues and problems at an early stage.

3   We will develop our own awareness by gathering and using management information about provider performance and encouraging feedback from learners.

4   We will encourage and facilitate development of the providers by setting higher standards and agreed timescales for provider Self Assessments. We will also ensure that Action Plans adopt the Common Inspection Framework format.

5   Opportunities will be identified and taken to make best use of the Standards Fund assistance to help the development of local providers.

6   This LSC will encourage excellence. Higher performing providers will be rewarded though improved contract terms, reflecting our trust. New initiatives such as *Preferred Suppliers* and *Centres of Excellence* will be introduced to recognise and reward the best providers.

7   Mediocre or poor providers will be challenged and firm action taken to raise standards. Where this is not realistic, we will cease contracting with them and switch to better quality providers.

8   We will encourage and facilitate the sharing and spread of good practise and excellence amongst the provider network.

9   We will improve communication with the Adult Learning Inspectorate and with OFSTED, working closely with the Inspectorates and providers before and after inspections. Our work with providers on Self Assessments, Action Plans and Provider Reviews will link more effectively with inspections.

10 Our Quality Assurance team will work with external organisations, as well as internal teams. It will act as a fulcrum for the LLSC, its providers and their sub contractors, to help deliver quality improvements.

11 Internally we will ensure high standards of consistency by introducing a quality management system with agreed procedures and processes. This system will enable us to audit both compliance and effectiveness in our local operations.

Setting the Agenda - Strategies and Targets

To embrace the principles and to raise standards our work will take shape in three separate phases :

Phase 1 - Until the end July 2002

Phase 2 - From August 2002 onwards

Phase 3 - Long term agenda

Phase 1 - Until end July 2002

We will map and research existing situations to establish baselines and trends

From this work we will be able to develop improvement strategies and set meaningful targets in some key areas : -

- ALI / OFSTED Inspection grades
- Learner Achievement and Retention Rates for Work based Learning and Further Education. Improving these rates is a key success factor for the LSC locally and nationally.
- Provider Self Assessment Reports & Development / Action Plans. Set baselines and improvement targets and link to Standards Fund projects

For other areas we will establish an agenda and strategy :-

- Streamlining activities e.g. develop Lead Arrangements for Work based Learning Providers to reduce duplication and confusion.
- Identify other forms of LSC provision e.g. UFI Hub, Adult & community Learning and engage them in our quality framework.
- Standardise Provider approach to Management information and use of learner feedback via Self Assessment / Development Plans.

Phase 2 - From August 2002

This phase will be a mixture of monitoring progress and developing our agenda and strategies from Phase 1 and evolving new agenda and targets as they emerge :

- Feedback from learner surveys will be used to set agenda and targets.
- Respond to national development priorities
- Work on local issues in concert with local networks e.g. MOBNET and COMBO such as teacher observation. Respond to, and develop, strategies.
- Make use of ALI and OFSTED in the spread of good practice.
- As the Provider Performance Review evolves make full use of the management information and trends identified to drive quality improvements and strategies.
- Involve providers more in development by introducing focus groups to work on sector and area issues.

Phase 3 - The Long Term

These are the aspirational themes that we will need to tackle and establish strategies and meaningful targets for in the longer term :

- Equality and Diversity
- Preferred Suppliers
- Centres of Excellence
- Establishing a common agenda and LSC approach to managing different types of provision.
- Competent and qualified training staff
- Provision of safe supportive environments for learners
- Value for money

> 11 Health and Safety

The Learning and Skills Council Health and Safety Manager (Programmes) Health and Safety Strategy outlined four expectations to assist in ensuring 'Learner Safety' on all government funded activities. Therefore in common with this strategy, 'Expectations' for the Learning and Skills Council for Milton Keynes, Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire are:

• The promotion of Provider responsibility and accountability for Learner health and safety – especially through an expectation of continuous improvement and via high quality health and safety content in self-assessments and development plans.

This will be achieved by encouraging providers to use the Good Practice Guide (10-point criteria) and self-assessment tools and through the initial vetting of potential contractors by use of the Gateway Questionnaire and initial visits with ongoing 'eyes and ears' monitoring of all contractual arrangements.

• The transition from the previous approaches to one of maximising influence and effect through the newer, more appropriate targeted ways of working with Work Based Learning Providers, FE Colleges, and voluntary sector adult and community learning providers

• Within this LSC this has been widened to include 6th Form Schools/Colleges, Education Business Link Organisations and those organisations providing activities or services through the Local Initiative Fund and/or European Social Fund and is intended to be inclusive of all future LSC funded activities and services.

This will be achieved, by ensuring Providers buy into the process of internal audit/review so that the local LSC health and safety reviews become a verification/validation of an existing process thus avoiding repetitive annual health and safety audits.

• To increasingly apply selective, risk-based approach targeted towards the concept of the 'safe learner'.

This will be achieved by utilising the established matrix or based on the Provider Performance Review criteria, ensuring that risk bands are kept up to date and are regularly reviewed. All Providers will be subject to a Health and Safety Review but the nature and frequency will be targeted according to risk. Visits will also be made to Learners at work and training locations to ensure safe and appropriate working environments have been established.

• For learner health and safety to be a pro-active, influential and integrated part of the growing remit of this LSC.

This will be achieved by the provision of accurate information to providers through provider bulletins, attendance at external group meetings and the provision of specific briefing sessions.

It is also the intention of this LSC to develop an environmental policy.

Learning and Skills Council

Local Strategic Plan 2002-05

Supporting Information

Learning+Skills Council
Milton Keynes, Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire

> 1   Geographical and Demographic Details of Local Area

The Milton Keynes, Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire area is made up of the whole of the County of Oxfordshire (including Henley-on-Thames, which was previously covered by Thames Valley Enterprise), the County of Buckinghamshire and the Borough of Milton Keynes.

The area is crossed by the M40 motorway, which runs from the South East corner at Beaconsfield to the North Western corner beyond Banbury. The M40 provides links to London, Birmingham and the North.

Milton Keynes is also close to the M1 (on its Eastern border) which again provides a valuable link to London and the Midlands and the North.

Geographic Diversity

Milton Keynes is a large conurbation and is one of the most well-known new towns in England. It has a growing population of around 212,000. This figure is expected to reach 236,000 by 2011.

Oxfordshire is a relatively rural county with a population of about 628,000 (which is expected to grow by less than 3% by 2011). Oxfordshire contains the main city of Oxford, and there are a number of population centres outside Oxford City: these are Abingdon, Banbury, Bicester, Didcot and Witney.

Oxford and Didcot have good rail links to London. Didcot, a rapidly expanding railway town provides a junction on the rail link between London and Bristol which travels northwards. Although the main arterial rail and road links to the rest of the country are good, transport within the area is less effective.

Buckinghamshire is a prosperous and largely rural county with a Gross Domestic Product (GDP) per head about 20% above the national average. The county's main population centres are Aylesbury and High Wycombe. However, much of the County's population live in smaller towns dispersed around the county. In total, the population numbers about 491,000 and this will grow by about 6% by 2011.

Aylesbury and High Wycombe both have rail links to the capital, whilst Amersham, Chesham and Chalfont are connected to the Underground network.

Political Background of Milton Keynes, Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire

Both Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire provide largely safe Conservative parliamentary seats. The Conservatives have enjoyed rural strongholds in these Counties for many years.

Only Oxford East, a diverse and densely populated area of Oxford (including Cowley, Headington and Blackbird Leys) has a Labour MP, currently Andrew Smith. The constituency is made up of large social housing estates, with areas of multiple-occupation accommodation and some affluent suburbs. The constituency also contains large ethnic minority communities.

The constituency of Oxford West and Abingdon remained Liberal Democrat at the last election, when Dr Evan Harris retained his seat.

Milton Keynes has two constituencies, both of which presently have Labour MPs: Brian White in Milton Keynes North East, and Dr Phyllis Starkey in Milton Keynes South West.

Economic and Demographic Trends

Economic Profile

Gross Domestic Product[1] data stands at £18,761 million, 17% of the South East. Per head figures[2] are slightly above the South East average (£13,731) for Buckinghamshire and Oxfordshire (approx. £13,900) but are well above the South East average in Milton Keynes (£17,557).

Demographic Profile and Change

- The area contains 1.3 million individuals, 16% of the South East[3] .
- 14.7% of the population are aged 5-15 - slightly above the proportion of the UK (14.3%) - although there are large differences at local authority level (15.8% Milton Keynes Unitary Authority to 12.8% Oxford City).
- 17% are over the age of 50 (below the national figure of 20.4%). The younger profile of Milton Keynes is indicated by a figure of only 13.3% over the age of 50.
- This profile influences the structure of the labour force (707,000) with Milton Keynes having a greater proportion of young people, and Buckinghamshire an older profile.
- Population for the whole area is projected to rise by 7% between 2001 and 2011.

Rural and Urban Deprivation

In some urban areas, such as parts of Milton Keynes, Oxford and High Wycombe, unemployment is much higher than the UK average and achievement levels are correspondingly lower. Health and disability problems, and unsatisfactory housing conditions are also often associated with these same areas[4].

1   Local area and sub-regional GDP, Office for National Statistics (ONS), 2001
2   Total GDP divided by the resident population
3   Region in Figures, 2000, South East. ONS (1998 based projections)
4   Indices of Deprivation 2000, Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions (DETR)

Deprivation can affect rural areas as well. Typically, these issues revolve mainly around access to services, such as lack of access to a post office, food shops, a GP or a primary school. These problems are prevalent in parts of West Oxfordshire, Vale of White Horse, Cherwell and Aylesbury Vale and impact particularly upon those residents on a low income.

In Milton Keynes, Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire, just over 1% of jobs remain in agriculture - less than the average for the South East or nationally.

Employer Profile

There are approximately 67,200[5] employer sites within the region (18% of the South East total).

Table 1 indicates how the area is structured by type of business. Milton Keynes, Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire is slightly more reliant upon the service sector for employment (these incorporate businesses other than those involved in agriculture, primary and construction) than is the case nationally, and less reliant upon both agricultural and primary sector organisations (mining and quarrying, energy and water supplies) and manufacturing.

	Milton Keynes	Bucks	Oxfordshire	UK
% Of business sites in agriculture 1999	2.2	6.6	4.7	7.2
% Of business sites in manufacturing 1999	8.3	7.6	8.4	8.4
% Of business sites in services 1999	81.2	76	77.3	75.5

Table 1: Percentage of business sites, or 'structure', in Milton Keynes, Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire compared to UK averages

Source: Region in Figures, 2000

	Milton Keynes	Bucks	Oxfordshire	UK
% Employed in agriculture	0.3	1.7	1.1	1.3
% Employed in manufacturing	16.3	14.9	16.0	17.5
% Employed in construction	3.5	4.6	4.0	4.6
% Employed in public sector	17.8	24.9	19.9	23.9

Table 2: Percentage of people employed in different business sectors in Milton Keynes, Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire compared with UK averages

Source: Region in Figures, 2000

5   Region in Figures, 2000, South East. ONS (inter-departmental data)

The impact of this structure on employment numbers is illustrated in **Table 2** where the smaller average size of manufacturers is reflected in lower proportions employed within the sector.

Technological and structural employment change (i.e. the impact of IT, reductions in middle-management roles etc.) has resulted in changing requirements for skills within businesses. Managerial and professional jobs account for 45.1% of all local jobs compared with 37.2% of jobs nationally.

Skills Issues and their Impact upon Businesses

There is a high proportion of recruitment difficulties across all sectors where employers cannot access the labour they need to function.

Reasons may include:

- uncompetitive conditions or salaries
- skills shortages
- skills gaps

Skill shortages (where employers cannot access the skills they require from the local labour market) and skill gaps (where employers have sufficient staff but not in the skills areas required) are prevalent. 34% of all local organisations report that 'shortage of suitable people' is a business concern. 27% identify a lack of skills in the workforce as a similar concern[6].

There is evidence to suggest that a large proportion of companies do not plan effectively in human resource terms. Data collected from within Oxfordshire suggests that 38% of organisations do not have a business plan and 25% do not have staff appraisal/review systems[7].

Future structural change

Econometric forecasts for the South East predict a further shift towards service industry sector jobs and higher order (professional and management) occupations. Manufacturing jobs are forecast to decline but the loss is likely to be smaller than elsewhere within the UK (less than 1% per year)[8].

In contrast distribution, transport and hotel-related activities, and business activities (banking, insurance, computing, research etc.) are likely to show increases above the national average.

Local area cluster research ('clusters' are groups of similar type businesses) has also suggested that parts of manufacturing are likely to benefit from the further development of clusters (including high technology based clusters).

6   Competitiveness Study, 2000
7   Oxfordshire Business Survey, 2000
8   Projections and Qualifications Regional Results for South East, in Projections and Qualifications, 2000/2001. Institute for Employment Research (IER), 2001

In occupational terms, most job sectors are expected to grow (in response to overall employment expansion) but much of the highest growth will be in management and professional jobs (greater than 1.5% per annum) compared with growth rates at less than 0.5% for unskilled and customer service occupations[9].

Economic Activity

Economic activity rates range from between 82.4% in Milton Keynes to 84.4% in Buckinghamshire, all well above the UK figure of 78.4%[10]. Whilst this is positive from the perspective of local individuals contributing towards the economy, it is also a constraining factor causing particular challenges in accessing new labour.

Full-time jobs are prevalent in Milton Keynes (94.9% of males, 61.1% of females are in full-time employment) whereas Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire tend to have a comparatively larger share of part-time jobs (Oxfordshire - 8.9% males, 42.8% females, Buckinghamshire - 8.2% males, 45.6% females). Overall, females make up 44.8% of the workforce in the area, although a significant proportion of these jobs are part-time[11].

Unemployment lies at exceptionally low levels. Those classified as 'Claimant Count' unemployed amount to 8,664 individuals, around 1.1% of the workforce[12].

Even using broader definitions of those not in employment and seeking work yields figures of 2.4% for Buckinghamshire, 2.5% for Oxfordshire[13], and 3.5% for Milton Keynes, i.e. close to, or above full employment.

By gender, about 25% of the claimant count in the area are females although this takes into account only those that are eligible to claim unemployment-related benefits. In reality, the proportion will be much higher and will include many females among the early retired and women returners.

Transport

Nationally, 61% of all journeys per person are made by car. This trend has been increasing year on year, with a 24% rise in number of journeys between 1986 and 1998. During that same period, journeys by other means have fallen dramatically, including bicycle (-36%), rail and bus (-24%) and walking (-18%).

Travel to work by car is the mode of travel to work for 7 out of 10 Milton Keynes, Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire workers[14] (61% nationally[15]). 62% of all workers in the area drive with a further 7% travelling as car passengers. Only 2% travel to work by train (6% nationally), and 4% by bus (10% nationally). 6% cycle, 9% walk and a further 8% work from home.

9   Ibid
10   Region in Figures, 2000, South East. ONS
11   Ibid
12   Labour Market Statistics, January, 2002
13   Ibid
14   Qualifications, Skills and Learning in the South East
15   1991 Census

Women are twice as likely as men to walk to work (12% compared with 6%), and more likely to take the bus (6% compared with 2%). These statistics are also reflected in the 16-24 age group.

81% of journeys to work in the area take less than 30 minutes, and only 6% take more than an hour.

About 14% of the area's residents work outside the Milton Keynes, Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire area as a whole. Oxfordshire is a fairly 'self-contained' labour market, whereas it is more likely that residents of Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes will be employed outside of their respective areas.

> 2 Profile of Learners and Provision

Profile of Learners

School performance in the Milton Keynes, Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire area

At Key Stage 4, there are two Targets to be achieved by 2002:

1. 50% of 16 year-olds getting 5 high grade (A*-C) GCSEs (or GNVQ equivalent)

2. 95% of 16 year-olds getting at least 1 GCSE (or GNVQ equivalent)

With regard to the first of these targets, Oxfordshire (achieving 55.5%) and Buckinghamshire (achieving 64.3%) have already achieved this, but Milton Keynes falls short with just 42%. The average for Milton Keynes, Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire is 56.5%.

As for the second target, Buckinghamshire (95.8%) has achieved the 95% target, but Oxfordshire and Milton Keynes fall slightly short with 94.3% and 93.5% respectively. The average for Milton Keynes, Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire is 94.7%.

These are figures for 2001.

Proportion of year 11s achieving 5 or more GCSE/GNVQ grades A-C (all schools)*

	Milton Keynes	Oxfordshire	Buckinghamshire	England
2000	41%	50%	62%	49%
2001	42%	56%	64%	50%

Table: Proportion of year 11s achieving 5 or more GCSE/GNVQ grades A*-C

Source: Department for Education and Skills (DfES), 2001

Buckinghamshire is ranked second in England (of all Learning Partnership areas) on this measure and is well above the national average. Oxfordshire's performance is also better than the national average. The performance in Milton Keynes, however, is well below both the national average and the National Target figure.

At individual teaching institution level, the variations are much greater, with some achieving 100 per cent on this measure while the lowest ranking school in this area achieved just 18 per cent in 2001.

Girls are achieving better results at GCSE/GNVQ across the area than boys with 67.9% girls achieving five or more A*-C grades in Buckinghamshire (compared with 55.6% boys), 57.1% girls in Oxfordshire (compared with 43.8% boys) and 45.8% girls in Milton Keynes (compared with 36.7% boys)[16].

16   Local Education Authority Data, 2000.

Proportion of year 11s achieving 1 or more GCSE/GNVQ grades A*-G (all schools)

	Milton Keynes	Oxfordshire	Bucks	England
2000	92.8%	94.6%	95.8%	**94.4%**
2001	93.5%	94.3%	95.8%	**94.5%**

Table: Proportion of year 11s achieving 1 or more GCSE/GNVQ grades A*-G

Source: Department for Education and Skills (DfES), 2001

The range in performance by institution is much smaller than is seen in Key Stage 4 Target 1, with the best performers showing 100% achievement and the lowest 81%.

A challenge remains, however for this LSC area to comfortably exceed the national target. There is a particular issue with regard to boys in Milton Keynes where the performance is as low as 92%.

Participation in post-compulsory education (full and part-time) of 16 year olds

	Milton Keynes	Oxon	Bucks[17]	MKOB LSC	South East	England
1994/5	N/a	83%	80%	N/a	83%	**79%**
1995/6	N/a	83%	81%	N/a	81%	**77%**
1996/7	N/a	81%	76%	N/a	80%	**77%**
1997/8	62%	81%	83%	77%	80%	**77%**
1998/9	63%	76%	80%	74%	78%	**77%**

Table: Participation in post-compulsory education (full and part-time) of 16 year olds

Source: Department for Education and Skills (DfES), 2001

Regional and national data shows how participation rates in full and part-time education have fallen over the last five years, partly in response to greater job opportunities.

Milton Keynes is of greatest cause for concern here, with participation rates for 16 year olds well below regional and national averages. This has probably impacted on the local LSC area figure, which is also slightly below average compared with the South East and England.

17 Percentages from 1994/5 to 1996/7 refer to the old county of Buckinghamshire including Milton Keynes. Those from 1997/8 onwards are for the new county of Buckinghamshire which excludes Milton Keynes.

Participation in post-compulsory education (full and part-time) of 17 year olds

	Milton Keynes	Oxon	Bucks	MKOB LSC	South East	**England**
1994/5	N/a	67%	71%	N/a	72%	**67%**
1995/6	N/a	72%	66%	N/a	69%	**67%**
1996/7	N/a	70%	65%	N/a	68%	**66%**
1997/8	52%	68%	71%	65%	66%	**65%**
1998/9	50%	70%	72%	65%	68%	**65%**

Table: Participation in post-compulsory education (full and part-time) of 17 year olds

Source: Department for Education and Skills (DfES), 2001

GCE A, AS, AGNVQ, VCE Average Point Score Per Entry

	Milton Keynes	Oxfordshire	Buckinghamshire	**England**
2000	4.9	5.9	6.3	**5.5**
2001	5.2	6.0	6.3	**5.5**

Table: GCE A, AS, AGNVQ, VCE Average Point Score Per Entry

Source: Department for Education and Skills (DfES), 2001

The average point score per entry is a measure based upon a scoring system used by the Department for Education and Skills which allocates points to grades achieved. On this measure, Milton Keynes is below the England average, with Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire both exceeding it. Buckinghamshire is ranked third of all Learning Partnership areas in England.

The average for Milton Keynes, Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire in 2001 was 6.0.

Destination of School Leavers

Analysing destinations of school leavers, 77.5% of Year 11s in Buckinghamshire went on to full-time education compared with 66.9% in Milton Keynes[18]. The equivalent figure for Oxfordshire was 67%[19].

18 Buckingham Careers Service
19 CfBT Thames Careers Guidance

Adult Basic Skills

Around 20% of the working population in Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire have been identified as having literacy difficulties. In Milton Keynes the figure is 24%.

For numeracy, the figures range from 24% in Milton Keynes, to 20% in Oxfordshire, and 15% in Buckinghamshire[20].

18.9% of adults in the Milton Keynes, Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire area have no NVQs (or equivalent) compared with 19.2% in the South East.

32% of those aged 55-64 have no NVQ (or equivalent).

27.2% of those who are unemployed have no NVQs (or equivalent).

Overall workforce qualification/learning attainment

National Learning Targets for 2002 state that 50% of the adult population should achieve Level 1 (NVQ3 or equivalent), and 28% Level 2 (NVQ4 or equivalent).

51.5% of the area's workforce have reached Level 1 (compared with 46.3% in the South East region), exceeding the national target.

33.1% of the area's workforce have reached Level 2 (compared with 27.9% in the South East region), again exceeding the national target.

The performance of specific groups, like Milton Keynes, Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire women, do not reflect the same rates of success (i.e. 50% reaching level 1). Only 48.6% of females have achieved Level 1 compared to the target figure of 50%. And of those working part-time only 37% achieved Level 1, well below the 50% target.

Current study and training activity (adults)[21]

10.4% of the area's workforce are currently studying for a qualification (rising to 36.8% of 16-24 year olds). Only 6% of the self-employed are currently studying.

6.4% of the workforce claim never to have trained.

37.7% of the area's workforce have trained in the last year. Of those, 36.9% spent a maximum of 5 days in training (rising to 53.3% of part-time workers) suggesting a lack of overall training policy.

Motivation to learn[22]

78.1% of the area's workforce are "positive" or "very positive" about future training (67.8% for self-employed). 30.5% claimed 'an increase in personal knowledge' and 31.6% cite 'personal satisfaction' as factors which would encourage them to undertake further training or study.

20 Adults' Basic Skills – Estimates of level of needs in English Unitary Authority and Wards, Basic Skills Agency.
21 Skills Audit, 2000
22 Skills Audit, 2000

22% of the workforce (and 24.3% of full-time workers) claimed 'a change of career' would be a factor in encouraging them to undertake future training. 20% cited a pay increase.

56.7% of the unemployed cited 'obtaining a job' as a motivating factor.

Of concern, 19.3% of the workforce said that nothing would encourage them to train (rising to 38.4% amongst those aged 55-64, and 35% of the self-employed).

A major barrier to training is 'lack of time', according to 29.1% of the local workforce surveyed. However, 48.1% said that there were no barriers stopping them. 15% of part-time workers cited looking after children/dependents as a particular barrier.

Minimising the barriers to training will have a clear impact upon the numbers in training and studying. However, it is also obvious that much needs to be done to accentuate the positive benefits of training, particularly among the older members of the workforce, the lower qualified and the self-employed.

Access to IT[23]

58.2% of the local workforce have access to a computer at work, and 67.1% at home.

22.5% of the workforce do not use a computer (which compares to 27.8% in the South East).

24.3% of part-time workers do not use a computer, nor do 25.6% of the self-employed.

Almost half (49.2%) of the unemployed do not use a computer, although this rises to 53.2% in the South East.

23 Ibid

Profile of Provision

Provision

Table 1 summarises the total number of secondary schools, Further Education (FE) and Higher Education (HE) establishments and training providers within the area, and analyses this by county and unitary authority.

Table 2 summarises the total number of students in the same way.

County/ Unitary Authority	Number of:			
	Secondary Schools*	FE Establishments	HE Establishments	Learning Providers***
Oxfordshire	35	6**	4	18
Buckinghamshire	34	2	1	5
Milton Keynes	10	1	2	13

Table 1: Summary of Provision by County/Unitary Authority

*Excluding independent sector

**not including Plater College

***excludes Providers based outside the area, e.g. Construction Industry Training Board.

| County/ Unitary Authority	Number of students/trainees attending			
	Secondary Schools* (16+)	FE Establishments**	HE Establishments	Learning Providers***
Oxfordshire	4570	32200	n/a	2264
Buckinghamshire	6005	10200	n/a	1270
Milton Keynes	1925	6200	n/a	1168

Table 2: Summary of Provision by County/Unitary Authority

*Source: January Census of Schools

**Source: Dr Terry Melia, Post-16 Education & Training in the Milton Keynes, Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire LSC area

***Source: Period 1 in-training records

The following map demonstrates the geographical spread of the above provision.

Higher Education Establishment

Further Education Establishment

Secondary School
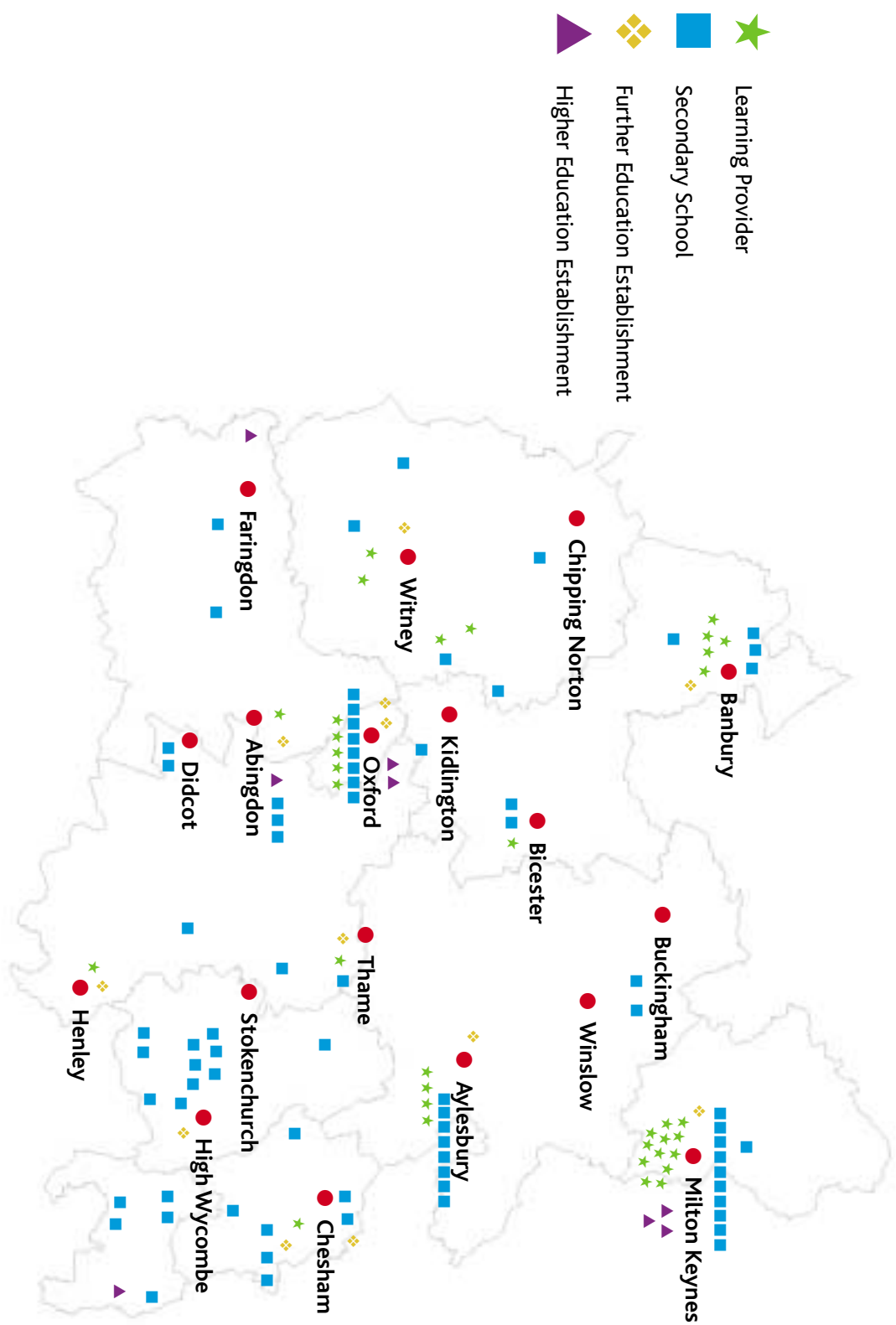
Learning Provider

> 3 Local Council Members

The following people are Council members of the Milton Keynes, Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire Learning and Skills Council:

Pat Upson

Dr Pat Upson is the executive director of Urenco, a European company providing services to the nuclear energy sector with headquarters at Marlow, Buckinghamshire. Dr Upson has been involved in the Training & Enterprise Council (TEC) since its earliest stages. He was part of a team that successfully bid for the TEC operation in Chester, Ellesmere Port and Wirral and served on its Board for three years. He was elected to the Thames Valley Enterprise Board two years ago and is now the Chairman of the Learning and Skills Council for Milton Keynes, Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire.

Lynda Purser

Lynda Purser has been part of the TEC movement since its inception, after teaching science and holding senior academic posts in the North of England. She set up and ran the TEC in Peterborough, establishing it as a successful organisation that was in the top quartile for every performance indicator applied to TECs while she was Chief Executive. Before coming to the LSC as Executive Director, she ran the South East Technology transfer unit based in Oxfordshire.

Jon Appleton

Jon Appleton has worked at Oxford Brookes University for 25 years and was a Governor for 10. Amongst his many roles he ensures that the University's Student Complaint, Disciplinary and Examination Appeal procedures are properly implemented.

He has been active in the public sector union UNISON (and its predecessor NALGO) for a similar period, serving on its National Executive for 8 years. Throughout his involvement he has played a leading role at local and regional level, particularly in relation to equal opportunities and education and training both at the workplace and within the union.

Elizabeth Brighouse

Elizabeth Brighouse is a Director of Oxfordshire Council for Voluntary Action, and is also the trustee of various organisations. She is also a Member of the South East England Regional Assembly representing Social and Environmental Partners, a Board Member of the South East England Development Agency, and a Board Member of RAISE (Regional Action and Involvement in South East). Ms Brighouse is also a member of various Strategic Partnerships in Oxfordshire including Employment and Health.

Raymond Ball

Ray Ball is the Chief Executive of Aylesbury Training Group, a provider of workbased training. He was previously the Chief Executive of the Institute of Legal Executives 1995-1998, Director of Administration for the British Library 1990-1995, and Company Secretary to the London SuperComputer Centre 1989-1990.

Mr Ball has a BA (Hons) in Psychology, and MSc in Decision Making, and is a Fellow of the Chartered Institute of Secretaries. In his spare time he has, until recently, been heavily involved in Further Education as the Chair of an FE College, and as a Director of the University of North London. He is currently a member of the Buckinghamshire Learning Partnership and a member of Buckinghamshire Chilterns University College's Technical Advisory Committee.

Clive Booth

Professor Clive Booth is Chairman of the Teacher Training Agency, the Review Body for Nurses and the multi-media education information company ECCTIS 2000 Ltd. He is also a Senior Education Adviser to the British Council and a Consultant to the World Bank and Council of Europe. He is the Chairman of the Oxfordshire Lifelong Learning Partnership, an Editorial Board Member of the Oxford Review of Education and a South East England Development Agency Board Member.

He was Vice-Chancellor of Oxford Brookes University (1986-97), Vice Chairman of the UK Committee of Vice-Chancellors and Principals (1992-95) and Director of Business Link Heart of England (1996-98).

Malcolm Brighton

Malcolm Brighton recently retired as the Chairman of DRS Data & Research Services plc, a medium-sized computer company in Milton Keynes. He has lived in the city for more than twenty years, during which time he has been active in a number of non-political community roles. He served on the board of the Milton Keynes Development Corporation, and is a past Chairman of both the Community Trust and the Chamber of Commerce Training and Enterprise. In 1993 he received an OBE for his work for Milton Keynes.

He currently chairs both the Fremantle Trust, a county-wide residential homes charity, and the Milton Keynes City Orchestra.

Jane Butcher

Jane Butcher has worked for over 16 years in the development and delivery of positive action measures to promote gender equality in learning, skills and employment. She has worked in both the public and voluntary sectors, and in partnership with a range of agencies involved in adult learning and regeneration in Oxfordshire.

Ms Butcher has a particular interest in enabling women to access new and non-traditional areas of work and in working for the real mainstreaming of equality issues. She manages grassroots provision through projects at Oxford Women's Training Scheme and via a national network.

Sally Dicketts

Sally Dicketts has spent her whole working life in the education field. She joined Milton Keynes College as Director of Curriculum and Learning Strategies, before becoming Director of Marketing and Development. She has been in post as Principal and Chief Executive of Milton Keynes College since September 1996.

She is on the Board of Countec; Milton Keynes Manpower Forum Ltd; MK Common Purpose; Buckingham Careers Service; the Lifelong Learning Partnership and the Large Employers Association in Milton Keynes.

Ms Dicketts is also Chair of the National Network for Women Managers; Chair of the Chiltern Region Open College Network; Chair of the National Open College Network.

David McGahey

David McGahey is Managing Director of AMEY Education. Prior to taking up this role, he was Buckinghamshire's Director of Education.

He has also worked across all phases of Education in five other Local Education Authorities, and before that taught in Further and Higher Education. He is a Trustee of the Thames Valley Partnership, Chairman of the Trustees of Buckingham Centre for the Arts, a Governor of Buckingham Upper School, and a Fellow of the Royal Society of Arts.

Norman Miles

Following a career as a Science Teacher, with particular interest in Careers and Vocation Guidance, Education Business Links and General Studies, Norman Miles worked as an independent assessor before becoming a full-time politician in 2000, as leader of Milton Keynes Council.

Mr Miles is Chair of the Milton Keynes Lifelong Learning Partnership and of Countec, the independent provider of education business links and work experience in and around Milton Keynes. He is also a school and college Governor, former Chair of a 'not-for-profit' training provider, and is Chair of the local Management Committee for ConneXions.

Alex Pratt

Alex Pratt is Chairman of the Small Business Service's National Assessment Panel and provides strategic advice on business support issues.

His first company Sunalex is based in Aylesbury and exports products (which focus on working conditions and ergonomics) to every continent. He is currently in the process of launching workallhours.com and the tomorrowclub, two new businesses which focus on the developing needs of people at work in the South East.

Identified as one of the UK's top 20 Rising Business Stars, Mr Pratt responded to a request by Michael Heseltine to advise the DTI on export help for small business.

He is a Fellow of the Royal Society of Arts and a long serving member of several other bodies including the Institute of Directors, the Chamber of Commerce, and the Academy of Chief Executives. He is also a Justice of the Peace.

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Ernest Reading

Ernest Reading is currently Chief Executive of Tensator Limited based at Kingston, Milton Keynes, Buckinghamshire.

He started as an apprentice engineer over 40 years ago and has risen to his present position through various roles such as Production Manager, Works Director and Sales Director.

Ernie is particularly committed to education and has a great interest in the well being and future of Milton Keynes.

John Wilder

John Wilder is Managing Director of a Commercial Printing Company in Wallingford. He is also the Chairman of Berkshire College of Agriculture and a Member of the British Printing Industries Federation Government and Industry Committee which includes Education.

Mr Wilder is currently studying at the Open University for an MBA using distance learning.

The Vision

"To ensure this local Learning and Skills
Council is at the forefront of collaborative,
exemplary provision of relevant learning
opportunities within the area in order to
realise the full potential of our people and to
maintain and raise economic performance."

Learning+Skills Council
Milton Keynes, Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire