

TO ALL POST-SIXTEEN PROVIDERS

Dear colleague

Raising Standards in Post 16 Learning

We wrote to you in November 2000 about the development of the new post-16 funding arrangements. We are now writing to tell you about the outcomes from the joint consultation by the Department and the Employment Service on the proposals for raising standards in post-16 learning.

We are grateful to everyone who responded to the consultation. There was a general welcome for the proposals, particularly the focus on the learner and the emphasis on continuous improvement through provider self-assessment. Some concerns were raised, particularly about bureaucracy and many respondents emphasised the importance of achieving consistency and effective partnership between all involved in raising standards in post-16 learning.

Your views and advice have been essential in helping us develop the proposals. The annexes to this letter provide an overview of the future arrangements and the expected implementation timescales. We are also enclosing a separate report summarising the written responses to the consultation and the discussion at the consultation conferences.

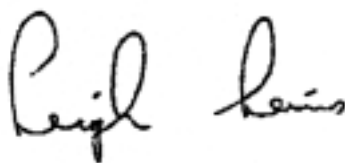
The first year for the new arrangements, which is also the Learning and Skills Council's first year of operations, will be a transitional period during which the new arrangements for self-assessment and inspection will be introduced. We recognise that many providers will require support to help them introduce the new arrangements. The Council, the Employment Service and the Inspectorates are working together to develop guidance for providers and establish appropriate support arrangements. Interim guidance on self-assessment and inspection requirements will be issued shortly. This will be revised during 2001 taking into account feedback from providers and operational experience.

The Learning and Skills Council and the Employment Service would welcome a continued dialogue with stakeholders. At both national and local level, we will encourage communication networks with providers and with employers and establish feedback arrangements with learners to ensure a continuing exchange on how best to raise standards in post-16 learning.

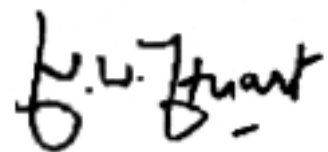
If you have any comments, or questions please write to Avril Willis Director of Quality and Standards for the Learning and Skills Council, 101 Lockhurst Lane, Foleshill, Coventry CV 6 6SF or Matthew Nicholas, Employment Service, Head of Job Seeker Mainstream Services, Level 1, Mayfield Court, 56 West Street, Sheffield S1 4EP. Alternatively, in the first instance, please telephone Steve Hunter on 0114 259 4870.



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RAISING STANDARDS IN POST-16 LEARNING: THE WAY FORWARD

In May 2000, the Department for Education and Employment (DfEE) and the Employment Service published a joint consultation paper on the proposals for Raising Standards in post-16 learning. There was overwhelming support for the principle of placing the learner at the heart of the system and strong endorsement of the overall model for raising standards. This model places the principal responsibility for the quality of provision with providers themselves, through self-assessment and development planning, supported by rigorous independent inspection and by monitoring and interventions where necessary by the Learning and Skills Council (the Council) and the Employment Service.

The arrangements outlined below relate to provision funded by the Council and the Employment Service from April 2001. These new arrangements will be phased in over a period to minimise turbulence to providers and to allow the Council and the Employment Service time to establish new systems. Annex 2 summarises the expected implementation timetable.

From April 2002, the Council will also take on responsibility for funding school sixth forms. The Council will not however directly monitor **school sixth form provision**. During 2001, the Council will discuss with Local Education Authorities (LEAs) and OfSTED the way the arrangements for raising standards in post-16 learning will operate for schools with sixth forms. This will include information exchange arrangements to enable local Learning and Skills Councils to draw on LEA monitoring arrangements with schools and OfSTED inspection reports for information on the quality of sixth form provision.

The Council, as part of its Corporate Plan, will publish a **Quality Improvement Strategy** setting out its priorities for raising standards. The Council will be consulting on the Corporate Plan and associated targets this Spring. The Employment Service will publish a Quality Framework which will be the basis of its approach to maintaining and improving quality in Employment Service funded learning provision from April 2001.

Respondents to the consultation emphasised the importance of effective partnerships between all involved in raising standards in post-16 learning in order to ensure consistency in requirements and avoid unnecessary bureaucracy. **The Council and the Employment Service will continue to work together** to ensure that, wherever possible, their processes and requirements are the same. These will be based on common core requirements and the sharing of information about providers. Monitoring and intervention will be based on risk assessments, informed by inspection findings, provider self-assessments and development plans. This approach will create opportunities for joint working and, in the longer term, mutual recognition between the Council and the Employment Service of their assessments of provider standards and performance.

The Inspectorates' reports on individual providers and on area inspections will be essential evidence for the Council and the Employment Service in planning provision, and will inform monitoring and reviews, any necessary intervention and the recognition of high quality provision. In order to support effective working relations, the Council, the Employment Service and the Inspectorates are drawing up a formal agreement setting out their respective remits and how they will work together to raise standards in post-16 learning.

The consultation established very strong endorsement for **the principle of continuous improvement through provider self-assessment**. Providers will be required to carry out an annual self-assessment of their provision and to agree with their local Learning and Skills Council/Employment Service development plans to address weaknesses and build on strengths. A development plan will be central to monitoring provider progress in raising and maintaining standards and identifying areas for provider support.

In taking forward the self-assessment arrangements, the Council and the Employment Service will seek to ensure provider self-assessments and development plans are as rigorous in years between inspections visits as in the year of inspection. They will work with the Inspectorates to develop the criteria against which providers will self-assess their provision and to develop guidance for providers on the self-assessment requirements.

The majority of respondents endorsed the proposals on **provider performance indicators** and considered that the publication of comparative performance information and benchmarking data would be effective in raising standards. However, many drew attention to the need for further development work. This includes: developing 'like with like' comparisons; developing 'value-added' measures; ensuring the robustness and comparability of data; addressing the potential skewing of provider behaviour and providing contextual information and guidance to help users interpret the performance indicators.

Further work has been undertaken to assess currently available information sources and define an interim set of provider performance indicators that the Council could use from April 2001. These cover achievement, retention, equal opportunities and customer satisfaction. In the longer term, the Council and the Employment Service will consider development of additional indicators relating to distance-travelled, value-added and value for money.

The Council and the Employment Service will also explore with partners ways to make available national benchmarking data, encourage provider networking, share good practice and support the development of local benchmarking activity.

There was considerable support for the proposal that the Council and the Employment Service should adopt a formal process for **recognising and rewarding high performers**. There was also a broad consensus that assessment for such awards should not begin until 2002-03 at the earliest. This timescale will give the Council and the Employment Service the opportunity to build up relationships with providers, and allow many of the underpinning arrangements for raising standards to become embedded and inspection evidence, which will be central to these decisions, to become available.

Further work will be undertaken to develop the criteria for assessments of high quality provision and to define the rewards and recognition arrangements. The consultation responses included a number of suggestions for rewards: longer contracts, provider publicity and public acclaim and a greater role for such providers in planning and early consultation by the Council on new developments.

Some providers also proposed that the principle of 'intervention in inverse proportion to success' should be applied to the monitoring and inspection arrangements. This is consistent with the current OfSTED approach where schools that have been successful are inspected less frequently and less intensively than others. The Council, the Employment Service and the Inspectorates support this principle and will discuss how this might operate once the first round of inspections under the Common Inspection Framework has been completed.

Until the new recognition arrangements come into force, **colleges accredited** under the current Further Education Funding Council (FEFC) arrangements may retain that title, provided they can satisfy the Council that they are maintaining standards. Such colleges will be included in the first round of inspections under the Common Inspection Framework. There will be no new awards of accredited status under the current FEFC system from April 2001.

The principle that all post-16 learners should be informed of their **entitlements and their corresponding responsibilities** received overwhelming support in the consultation responses. We intend that every post-16 learner, their provider and where appropriate their employer, will have their expectations and responsibilities clearly set out, and reviewed during and at the end of the period of learning. The Council and the Employment Service will specify the common core requirements for all parties involved. Providers will have discretion to decide how these should be conveyed to learners (and employers) in the light of local circumstances.

These arrangements will be monitored and reviewed through providers' own self-assessments, and the Council and the Employment Service provider review process. In parallel with these arrangements, **customer feedback and complaint handling arrangements** will be established for both the Council and providers.

The Council and the Employment Service will conduct annual, and where appropriate, in year **reviews of provider performance**. The purpose of these reviews is to assess provider performance as a whole, to establish progress against requirements of the funding agreements and to encourage continuous improvement in the quality of provision. The reviews will draw together the full range of evidence on provider performance, including information from self-assessments, progress on development plans, performance data and evidence of financial and other monitoring activities (including those of the awarding bodies and Qualifications and Curriculum Authority) and inspection findings. Conclusions from the reviews will inform decisions by the Council/Employment Service on future interventions and rewards.

The frequency and level of detail of the reviews will be determined based on the risk exposure and impact of the provision. The Council and the Employment Service will seek opportunities for alignment of review timetables and for joint assessments.

Respondents to the consultation expressed strong support for **funding for raising standards**, but also voiced concerns about the adequacy of funding levels and availability across all sectors. As a transitional measure, the current FE Standards Fund, and arrangements for Adult and Community Learning, will continue to operate in 2001-02 and the local Learning and Skills Councils' Initiative Fund will be available to provide support for standards developments in work-based learning. The Council, in consultation with DfEE and the Employment Service, will review these arrangements with the intention of replacing the current separate funding arrangements with a more unified post-16 Standards Fund, within the resources available. This transition is expected to take place during the first two years of the Council's operations.

Equality of opportunity will be built in to all aspects of the quality assurance arrangements. In designing their business processes, the Council and the Employment Service will work with the Equal Opportunities Commission, Commission for Racial Equality, the Disabilities Rights Commission and others to ensure the requirements on providers and, where appropriate, employers, support and encourage equality of access to learning opportunities and close gaps between different groups in learning and job outcomes.

INDICATIVE TIMESCALES	Post-16 RAISING STANDARDS ARRANGEMENTS - IMPLEMENTATION PLAN
2001 January:	OfSTED and the Adult Learning Inspectorate's Statutory Consultation on Common Inspection Framework ends
February:	Publication of ES Quality Framework
March:	<p>Joint LSC/ES guidance for Providers on self-assessment and development plans published</p> <p>Draft Inspection Handbooks issued</p> <p>Publication of Good Practice Guide on Self Assessment in Work Based Learning</p>
April:	<p>ES contracts for Work Based Learning for Adults commence, including implementing principles of Quality Improvement</p> <p>Cycle of Inspection of New Deal for Young People continues against the Common Inspection Framework</p> <p>Inspection of Work Based Learning for Young People against Common Inspection Framework begins</p>
May:	Proposals for LSC funded provision (Work Based Learning for Young People, FE Colleges and Adult and Community Learning) on Learner Entitlements and Responsibilities and on Complaints Handling issued.
May - July:	OfSTED and ALI joint inspections of the first 5 colleges against the Common Inspection Framework.
May - September:	LSC development, in consultation with LEAs / School Sixth ÉForms and OfSTED of arrangements for raising standards in schools with sixth forms .
June:	Publication of LSC Corporate Plan, incorporating the LSC's Quality Improvement Strategy for Post-16 Learning
July:	Provider Reviews cycle begins for LSC funded provision .
July - December:	LSC/DfEE joint review of Standards Fund/infrastructure funding arrangements and development of proposals for a unified post-16 Standards Fund.

INDICATIVE TIMESCALES	Post-16 RAISING STANDARDS ARRANGEMENTS - IMPLEMENTATION PLAN
September:	<p>Inspection of all FE colleges against the Common Inspection Framework on a four year cycle begins.</p> <p>Introduction of requirements for all newly appointed FE College teaching staff to be qualified or agree to work towards required qualifications</p>
October - November:	Pilot inspection for ES provision by Provider commences
Dec 2001 - Mar 2002:	Agreement between the Learning and Skills Council and Qualifications and Curriculum Authority on working methods, including data exchange
2001 January:	<p>Inspection of learndirect against the Common Inspection Framework begins</p> <p>Arrangements for revised post-16 Standards Fund/infrastructure support funding - draft guidance issued</p>
April:	<p>Inspection of Adult and Community Learning against Common Inspection Framework begins</p> <p>Cycle of Provider as unit of inspection for ES Provision commences</p>
April- September:	New arrangements introduced for recognising and rewarding high quality providers (Work Based Learning for Young People and FE Colleges)

Learning to Succeed

RAISING STANDARDS IN POST 16 LEARNING

RESPONSES TO THE CONSULTATION

May - July 2000

RAISING STANDARDS IN POST-16 LEARNING: POST-CONSULTATION REPORT

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FOREWORD

On the 26th May 2000, the DfEE and the ES jointly published 'Learning to Succeed – Raising Standards in Post-16 Learning' consultation on the DfEE website. A summary version of the document was published in hard copy format and disseminated to over 1,000 organisations actively involved in the delivery of work based learning.

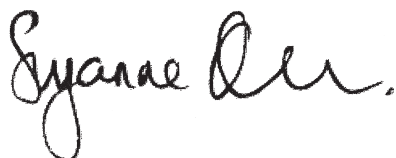
We now have pleasure in publishing this report which is a summary of the responses to the consultation.

More than 300 written and email responses covering the 15 specific consultation questions and wider comments on the proposals were received. Additionally, during July the DfEE and ES organised, in partnership with FEDA, four workshop style conferences. These conferences were attended by over 500 delegates and provided us with the opportunity to discuss with practitioners their reactions.

We are pleased to report that the overall responses to the consultation have been supportive of the proposals. The majority of respondents either tended to agree or agree strongly with each of the questions. The main issues of concern relate to potential burdens of paperwork and bureaucracy which may be associated with the proposals and the means of ensuring consistency and effective partnership between all those involved in raising standards in Post-16 Learning.

In order to address these concerns, the LSC, the ES and DfEE will work together, consulting with OfSTED and ALI, to develop the future business processes and guidance for providers, based on common core requirements and the sharing of information. We will also continue to work closely with key stakeholders and representative bodies on the development of future arrangements.

We are grateful to all organisations and individuals who took time out of their busy schedules to respond to the consultation and attend the conferences. Your views and advice will help ensure the future arrangements are effective in raising standards in post-16 learning and meet the need for coherence and consistency across the sector as a whole.



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INTRODUCTION

This consultation report has been produced jointly by Raising Standards Division (formerly Quality and Financial Assurance Division), DfEE and colleagues in Jobseeker Mainstream Services Division of the Employment Service.

The report is in two sections:

Section 1. summarises the analysis of the written responses to the consultation

Section 2. summarises the key issues identified by respondents through both their written responses and the consultation conferences

Some of the questions have natural linkages one to another and where this occurs the questions and responses have been identified and grouped together.

The question on implications for ES Providers has been the subject of much interest and comment and a separate summary of points raised has been included in this report.

Further copies of this report can be obtained by contacting::

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SECTION 1.

ANALYSIS OF THE WRITTEN RESPONSES TO THE CONSULTATION

ANALYSIS OF THE WRITTEN RESPONSES TO THE CONSULTATION

INTRODUCTION

This report has been based on 331 responses to the consultation document. As some respondents have offered more than one answer to a specific question, total percentages listed under any one question may exceed 100%. Similarly, some respondents may not have indicated a framework preference. Throughout the report percentages are expressed as a measure of answers to each question, not as a measure of all respondents.

The organisational breakdown of respondents was as follows:

Colleges	77
Training Providers	66
Schools	47
Local Authorities	27
TECs	22
Commercial & Industrial/Organisations	15
College Associations	8
National Bodies	4
School Associations	3
Others	62

OVERVIEW

Overall respondents have been supportive of the proposals contained within the consultation document, with the majority of respondents stating that they either tended to agree or strongly agree with each of the questions posed.

SUMMARY

Q1. Do you agree these are the key design principles to underpin the development of the arrangements for raising standards in post-16 learning?

There were 321 responses to this question.

130	(40%)	strongly agreed
167	(52%)	respondents stated that they tended to agree
17	(5%)	neither agreed nor disagreed
5	(1.5%)	tended to disagree
1	(0.5%)	strongly disagreed
1	(0.5%)	did not know
47	(15%)	respondents supported the proposal to keep bureaucracy to a minimum to safeguard public funds but highlighted concerns about making this work in practice.
32	(10%)	respondents stated that more detail was required throughout the document.

Q.2 Do you agree that these proposals provide clear responsibilities for those involved in raising standards in post-16 education and training?

There were 310 responses to this question.

74	(24%)	strongly agreed
165	(53%)	tended to agree
36	(11.5%)	respondents said that they neither agreed or disagreed
24	(8%)	stated that they tended to disagree
9	(3%)	respondents strongly disagreed
2	(0.5%)	did not know

Q.3 Do you agree the proposed contracting arrangements strike the right balance between ensuring high quality provision while encouraging innovation and new providers to enter the market?

There were 304 responses to this question.

44	(14%)	strongly agreed
157	(52%)	tended to agree
56	(18%)	neither agreed or disagreed
27	(9%)	tended to disagree
10	(3%)	respondents stated that they strongly disagreed
10	(3%)	did not know

Q.4 Do you agree with the requirements of providers and do they focus effectively on raising standards?

There were 305 responses to this question.

96	(31%)	strongly agreed
165	(54%)	tended to agree
19	(6%)	neither agreed or disagreed
17	(5%)	tended to disagree
7	(2%)	strongly disagreed
1	(0.5%)	did not know

Q.5 Do they favour any particular types of providers at the expense of others?

There were 288 responses to this question.

156	(54%)	said yes
118	(41%)	said no
14	(5%)	did not know

The main concern raised by respondents was that institutions such as FE colleges, schools and larger organisations would be favoured at the expense of small organisations and specialist providers.

Q.6 Do you agree that a statement on post-16 learners' entitlements and responsibilities would be valuable for learners? What are the key issues to be addressed in taking this proposal forward?

There were 309 responses to this question.

149	(48%)	strongly agreed
108	(35%)	tended to agree
27	(9%)	neither agreed or disagreed
18	(6%)	tended to disagree
4	(1%)	strongly disagreed
3	(1%)	did not know

Nearly 50% of the respondents who commented claimed that entitlements and responsibilities were already included in their Charters, Learning Agreements or Training Plans.

Nearly 50% also said that any statement should be tailored to meet the needs of individual learners and should take local circumstances into account.

40% argued that a nationally agreed framework, which could be tailored to meet local needs, was preferable to a centrally devised format.

More than 30% commented that plain English was needed.

Q.7 What are the key issues to be addressed in developing common measures and evidence portfolios for the LSC/ES and other national agencies to inform quality monitoring arrangements?

There were 242 responses to this question.

- 123 (51%) respondents mentioned the need for consistency and standardisation. This refers to the paperwork and reports that are required, the information that is submitted and the time that they are due.
- 57 (24%) stated that bureaucracy needed to be kept to a minimum.
- 28 (12%) stated a key issue was the need to keep the common measures simple and easy to understand.
- 17 (7%) stated that a key issue was benchmarking and that the benchmarks set must be clear and transparent.
- 17 (7%) emphasised that the common measures must be flexible and take into account socio-economic factors.

Q.8 Do the proposed performance indicators provide an appropriate base to assess quality and continuous improvement effectively?

There were 304 responses to this question.

- 214 (70%) said yes
- 64 (21%) disagreed
- 26 (9%) did not know

- 40 (13%) respondents suggested that the proposed indicators needed to place emphasis on value added issues as well as qualifications gained.
- 23 (8%) respondents were concerned at how value for money will be measured and whether specialist providers would be expected to reduce their provision if they did not fall in line with value for money indicators.
- 16 (5%) respondents said that the indicators were too vague, more specific detail needed to be given and the indicators needed to be more precise and relevant to individual institutions.
- 14 (5%) respondents stated that more emphasis needed to be given on ensuring learner satisfaction was achieved.
- 12 (4%) were concerned that retention rates would prove difficult to measure.

Q.9 In what circumstances are published comparative performance information and benchmarking helpful in raising standards? Are there circumstances where such information should not be published?

There were 300 responses to this question.

- 63 (21%) strongly agreed
- 156 (52%) stated that these were useful in raising standards
- 52 (17%) said that they did not find it useful
- 29 (10%) said they did not know

- 84 (28%) agreed that they would be useful as long as like providers were compared to like, performance tables that did not do this can be demoralising for staff and do not have any value.
- 59 (20%) respondents said that value added criteria should be taken into consideration when compiling performance information.
- 19 (6%) respondents stated that there should be no league tables as they do not give a true representation of the provider.

Q.10 Do you consider the proposed provider review will be effective and will identify providers who need to improve performance and who need additional support and/or guidance from the LSC and/or ES?

There were 287 responses to this question.

248 (86%) said yes
28 (10%) said no
11 (4%) did not know

Q.11 Should the current accredited and Beacon status of FE colleges be carried forward until the new arrangements are established?

There were 283 responses to this question.

183 (65%) said yes
68 (24%) said no
32 (11%) did not know

23 (8%) of the total, respondents also added that all providers should be treated equally.

Q.12 Do you agree that the award of preferred/approved provider status should be available across all types of providers? If so, what benefits should this status attract?

There were 297 responses to this question.

99 (33%) strongly agreed
124 (42%) tended to agree
30 (10%) neither agreed or disagreed
15 (5%) strongly disagreed
21 (7%) tended to disagree
8 (3%) did not know

38 (13%) respondents stated that the benefits this status attracted should include longer contracts.

37 (12%) said that a benefit should be extra funding and resources.

33 (11%) suggested less inspection, monitoring and 'lighter touch' inspections could be a benefit.

25 (8%) respondents also added that benefits should involve provider publicity and public acclaim.

Q.13 In what circumstances would it be appropriate for the LSC or ES to invest resources to improve marginal or unsatisfactory provision? How should this be done and how should such investments be safeguarded?

There were 207 responses to this question.

62 (30%) said that it would be appropriate if the provider were failing in one or two areas or is failing due to circumstances beyond its control.

59 (29%) respondents suggested that it would be appropriate if the provider was geographically isolated and it was deemed in the interests of the local area.

35 (17%) stated that if significant improvement was required investment would be appropriate.

- 22 (11%) respondents suggested that funding should be made available for providers to develop and share views on good practice by for example visiting similar successful establishments.
- 17 (8%) said that money should be made available for the training and development of staff.
- 34 (16%) respondents said a way to safeguard the investment was to monitor the provider more closely.
- 28 (14%) respondents suggested the best way to safeguard the investment was to set strict timescales and see that they were adhered to.
- 15 (7%) respondents stated that setting targets and action plans with measurable outcomes would be the best way.

Q.14 What type of support should the LSC and ES provide to encourage new developments and collaboration to improve learning opportunities and the efficiency and effectiveness of delivery?

There were 246 responses to this question.

- 101 (41%) respondents said that this should be financial, including the submission of bids to support specific projects.
- 97 (39%) respondents suggested some form of sharing good practice, be it providers coming together, quarterly publications or information on the internet. Some respondents stated that due to providers being in competition with each other the sharing of good practice would not be possible.
- 64 (26%) respondents said the most important area was training and development of staff and management, this also involved providing training events and workshops.
- 63 (26%) stated that some form of support groups and networking opportunities needed to be made available.
- 31 (13%) stated that partnerships which linked new providers with well established ones needed to be marketed to encourage learning.
- 22 (9%) suggested that a website containing advice and information should be introduced.

Q.15 What additional support is needed during the transition to help providers prepare for the introduction of the new arrangements for raising standards in post-16 learning?

There were 233 responses to this question.

- 102 (44%) respondents stated that the additional support during the transition period needed to be clear and consistent with up to date guidelines and information.
- 75 (32%) said that it was imperative there was sufficient implementation time to prepare for such a transition.
- 50 (21%) said that extra funding and resources would be needed specifically for this period.
- 45 (19%) respondents suggested that staff would need training and development.
- 34 (15%) suggested that seminars and workshops would be of use.
- 33 (14%) respondents said that any support that they receive should be on an ongoing basis, for example the use of telephone helplines.
- 18 (8%) thought that consultants should be available to help with continuity during the transition.
- 11 (5%) respondents stated that a clear timetable with clear deadlines needed to be in place for the transition period.

SECTION 2.

SUMMARY OF THE RESPONSES TO THE CONSULTATION

RESPONSES TO QUESTION 1.

Q. Do you agree these are the key design principles to underpin the development of the arrangements for raising standards in post-16 learning?

- It was suggested that there was a need for a vision statement to outline the desired state in five years time.
- The statutory equality commissions, the TEC National Council and others called for equality of opportunity to be one of the distinct principles in order to signal the Department's headline commitment and to place equality of opportunity at the heart of the new arrangements.
- Adult and community education interests warned of the dangers of standardisation when providers need to move further towards meeting individual and local community needs and to address wider participation. Other respondents pointed out the need for adequate and appropriate funding to ensure the delivery of high quality services; the importance of appropriate learning resources to enable effective learning to take place; and the need for LSC and ES staff to be adequately trained.
- While continuous improvement was endorsed as a laudable aim, it was pointed out that the maintenance of existing high quality might be more motivating and realistic for some providers.
- Concern was expressed about "rewarding" high quality provision when this should be the norm, also a warning about over-expansion of providers who may lack the necessary extra infrastructure and expertise.
- Respondents also sought greater clarity in the relationship between the LSC and LEAs.

RESPONSES TO QUESTION 2.

Q. Do you agree that these proposals provide clear responsibilities for those involved in raising standards in post-16 education and training?

- The key role of the LSC in bringing about quality improvement needed greater emphasis. Respondents also sought further clarity on where the role of the national LSC stops and that of the local LSC begins, and on how consistency between the 47 local LSCs will be achieved while at the same time minimising bureaucracy.
- Schools and TEC/CCTEs called for the role of LEAs to be clarified, with a question as to whether the school or the LEA would be regarded as the provider and with a mix of views as to where responsibility for performance should rest. There was a suggestion for an initial Service Level Agreement with LEAs to be followed in later years by a contract with targets, performance information and a requirement on LEAs to monitor and analyse performance against agreed criteria.
- Closer links with Connexions, local Learning Partnerships (especially to engage new providers and the voluntary sector), National Training Organisations and Awarding Bodies were sought. System rationalisation was required in view of the range of potential inspecting bodies and the need for a seamless interface with HE requirements. We were reminded that the role of learners themselves in ensuring quality and raising standards should not be neglected.
- Concerns were expressed about over-reliance on benchmarks, raw performance indicators and comparative performance tables in view of the diversity of providers, learners and their learning goals. Instead, there was a call for measures of "distance travelled".
- The statutory equality commissions welcomed the articulation of the LSC's and ES's roles in relation to requirements on providers and review procedures but wished to see a clearer indication of how the objectives will be met, with an emphasis on the need for the key bodies (LSC, ES and the Inspectorates) to be exemplary equal opportunity employers.

RESPONSES TO QUESTION 3

Q. Do you agree the proposed contracting arrangements strike the right balance between ensuring high quality provision while encouraging innovation and new providers to enter the market?

- There were some concerns that the proposals do discriminate against new providers and those moving into new territories and do not support innovation, although any fast track arrangements for new providers should not compromise quality. At the same time there was a plea that the requirements should not be so costly as to prohibit organisations from seeking funding. The potential for conflict of interest where existing and new providers are 'partnered' was also raised.
- There was a warning that performance indicators should not rely on easy measures, such as qualifications, as some of the most innovative work takes place in non-traditional areas.
- Until all providers have been inspected against the new Common Inspection Framework, there was a request for interim measures of quality in the absence of comparable inspection reports.
- The need for an appropriate skills mix within the LSC and ES was raised, especially to assist new providers who may need time to develop capacity to deliver to the required standards.
- It was also pointed out that more consideration should be given to training for self-employment, as the core of employed people is shrinking and the periphery of contract work is expanding.

RESPONSES TO QUESTION 4, 5 & 10

Q. Do you agree with the requirements of providers and do they focus effectively on raising standards?

Q. Do they favour particular types of providers at the expenses of others?

Q. Do you consider the proposed provider review will be effective and will identify providers who need to improve performance and who need additional support and/or guidance from the LSC and/or ES?

- Respondents felt that the quality of learning would not be improved by audit processes based on volumes, compliance with funding agreements or by sanctions.
- Respondents representing work based learning thought the TEC contract was over specified with the emphasis on quantity and probity as opposed to quality.
- It is important for the LSC to develop a well thought out Quality Improvement Strategy which includes funding agreements, thus reducing the audit burden on all. However, it was also recognised that the LSC must have a robust audit system which considered compliance with the funding agreement.
- The LSC and ES need to work together and to agree to accept each others findings, thus reducing duplication of effort. The need to have one approved/preferred provider list meeting the needs of both organisations was cited as a prime example.
- The provider review process should include all aspects of performance, including the learner's perceptions.
- Concern was expressed that ES District Managers assume they have discretion in relation to determining local provision, particularly for cross boundary LSC/ES provision.
- There is a need for a common language/terminology for LSC, ES, FE and work based provision.

- There is also a need for greater co-ordination and integration between the various inspection bodies, including the LSC.
- Concern was expressed at the role employers will have. Clarification was called for especially in relation to their responsibilities.
- The national contracting model will need to fit into the review process.
- National contractors should be subject to a national audit with local dimensions built in. There was a call for a national framework with local reviews and access to national and local benchmarking and LMI. Reviews should be flexible to address providers provision and have a quality focus.
- Consideration should be given to offering longer term contracts, possibly 3 years, with funding guarantees to encourage commitment to developing quality. Some representatives of the NTO network expressed the view that the contract should be flexible to allow for issues arising from the review and inspection process.
- Volumes and price alone should not drive the process. To reward a provider with additional provision is not always the solution. Alternative reward mechanisms should be developed.
- The credibility and scope of providers business plans needs to be considered. This should also consider the involvement of employers in the plan.
- There is a real need for common and shared MIS for all providers and funding bodies. In developing the system, decisions need to be made on who end users will be and what their requirements are. The system should include analysis and benchmarking information both at a micro and macro level; comparisons between different providers and provision at a national and local level and groups of learners.
- The competence and skill levels of the staff with responsibility for making the assessment and conducting the review is seen as a key issue. The staff concerned should have an understanding of the delivery of provision and not just contract compliance.
- The individual 'learner' should be given the opportunity to comment on their experience. This should be included in the review process.
- It is important to define 'value for money' and how to measure 'value added' in respect of the distance travelled by the learner.
- The process should take into account the widening participation agenda.
- The role of the LSC in working with individual providers to help them meet the challenges and opportunities of the future was seen as critical. Where the provider has identified opportunities what support will be available to them from the LSC?
- In some areas part-time TSC inspectors have given valuable support to providers. It was hoped this could be developed?
- If the NTOs are involved in the review process will this be in conflict with their support function. Concern was expressed about the capacity of the NTO network to take on additional work.
- There is a danger that a lighter touch inspection/review process could lead to complacency.
- There was considerable interest in the role of the 'Standards Fund' in supporting and developing provision.

RESPONSE TO QUESTION 6

Q. Do you agree that a statement on post-16 learners' entitlements and responsibilities would be valuable for learners? What are the key issues to be addressed in taking this forward?

ISSUES AND CONCERNS

- A lot of good practice already exists and this should be built on e.g. Charters and Learner agreements.
- Identification of minimum core information requirements will be critical, as will consistency with other key partners e.g. ES, Connexions, Learning Partnerships, ALI etc. Keep the language clear and simple and learner friendly.
- There was support for the LSC and its providers to develop customer and complaint handling arrangements which will provide early warning of problems. ES and LSC will need to agree a coherent approach.
- There is a need to clarify the role of Learning Partnerships in establishing mechanisms to enable feedback from learners.
- The future of the current DfEE follow up and feedback was a concern. It was hoped that this would continue.

COVERAGE AND TIMING

- It was felt that this should be standard practice. FE colleges have student charters and learning agreements in place and this should be built on.
- All parties must sign up to the statement and monitor it on a regular basis.
- The system should inform choice for all learners, drive the new learning environment and have examples to encourage people to do the best they can.
- The framework must be capable of meeting national and local needs in all sectors.
- Clarification was called for on who should be included. What about the learner who spends 3 hours a week in learning?
- Needs to be in place from the start of the learning process and minimum standards set.
- The learners need to understand their responsibilities and part in the process.
- The statement must be intended to improve the learning experience and not be prescriptive.
- Put the learner in the driving seat but ensure that all the parties know their roles.
- Clarify who will be responsible for monitoring, evaluation and taking forward actions.
- Need to agree the core information and how the learner raises concerns, to whom and how they will be handled.
- Consideration should be given to the rights and responsibilities of the provider in the process.

RESPONSIBILITY FOR THE STATEMENT

- A joint agreement involving all parties. A practical working document which puts the learner first and must be more than a feel good document.
- Colleges have used the FE charter as a framework. The statement must be aimed at improving the experience, not be prescriptive and lead to improved consistency.
- Should be linked to the common inspection framework.
- When a problem arises the system should allow the individual to take immediate action. A confidential helpline may be the answer.
- The statement should promote good working relationships between the learner, their employer and training provider. Perhaps a best practice model could be developed.
- Use of a formal statement could be disadvantageous to certain adult learners as their support needs may vary e.g. special needs.

CONTENT

- Need for clear standards of delivery, tailored to meet the diverse needs of the learner.
- The learner must know what to expect from the employer and employers must be aware of what they are signing up to. Standards must not be set too low and be set out in the statement.
- Equal Opportunities and Health and Safety must be core elements.
- The content of the statement should encourage continuous improvement, standardisation is important.
- The statement should list the “basic skill needs” of the learner. This might be inappropriate terminology if the learner is a graduate, but is a good idea in principle. One idea is to list the ‘individual skills needs’ this should establish exactly what level the learner is starting from.
- The statement should state the need for regular feedback and also list the learner’s responsibilities towards other learners.

IMPLICATIONS

- Instead of widening participation it could actually be a further barrier.
- The statement must not become another layer of bureaucracy and should be ideally linked to the training/learning plan.
- Must be clear about contacts, responsibilities and accountability.
- Providers expressed concerns about any additional cost implications.

TERMINOLOGY

- Danger in using the phrase “Statement of Learners’ Entitlements and Responsibilities” because of the consequent acronym (SLER).
- Preference for “Charter” – already used by some colleges and some providers.
- “Contract” was considered unsuitable as it was too legalistic.
- “Joint Learning Agreement” or “Training Agreement” or “Learners’ Expectations” were preferred as it should inspire the learner rather than be perceived by its title as a disciplinary tool.

RESPONSE TO QUESTION 7

Q. What are the key issues to be addressed in developing common measures and evidence portfolios for the LSC/ES and other national agencies to inform quality monitoring arrangements?

There was overwhelming support for the principle of continuous improvement through self-assessment validated by external inspection.

Providers are at different stages of developing self-assessment and development plans, and for some i.e. Adult and Community Education this was a relatively new experience. Many providers had gone through inspection, and others were preparing for inspection for the first time. But the consensus was that self-assessment worked effectively where it is well supported.

ISSUES AND CONCERNS

- The majority of respondents were in favour of the LSC and ES having a clear role in 'mentoring' and supporting providers with self-assessment and development plans. However, this was dependent on the LSC and the ES employing staff with the right skills and experience to ensure credibility with providers. Respondents thought that the LSC and ES staff should receive similar training to the inspectors to ensure consistency in the advice that they give on self-assessment and development plans.
- There was consensus that the LSC and ES should monitor providers provided that such activity complemented and did not duplicate the inspection process. LSC and ES would need to work jointly where a provider is funded by both to avoid duplication of monitoring.
- A pressing concern for providers was understanding what is expected of them with the new Common Inspection Framework. Respondents were in favour of joint training taking place with the LSC, ES and inspectorates to ensure that a shared understanding is achieved. This led to a common request for early guidance on the new requirements to enable providers to prepare for the first round of inspections from April 2001.
- A general concern was that the self-assessment process should be more than a paper exercise driven by the LSC and ES. Providers thought that this would only be possible where a culture of mutual trust and openness existed between the LSC, ES and providers and that this trust and openness would need to be developed over time.

OTHER COMMENTS

- At present there is a variable approach to self-assessment and in some cases a feeling exists that it is only part of inspection and something that is "done to you" by the Inspectorates once in every four years.
- Providers stated that it would be helpful to have a common self-assessment standard with clearly published criteria.
- More clarity is needed on how OFSTED and ALI will work together.
- Consideration should be given to adopting best practice across the post-16 sector.
- Self-assessment reports should be a working tool and be "fit for purpose".
- National providers – at present there is one central action plan. Many providers expressed concern that this action plan did not allow for variations in the level and quality of delivery at a local level.
- From an employer perspective the current self-assessment process is not geared to meeting their needs: - if employers don't feel it is appropriate they will just walk away.
- The evidence criteria needs to be more specific, transparent and relevant.
- Smaller institutions will need additional support with self-assessment and the action planning processes if they are not to be disadvantaged compared with the larger providers.
- There is a need now for support material on how to undertake and produce a good Self-Assessment - something like a starter pack.
- There is a need for the consistent monitoring of schools - ensuring that LEA monitoring of 6th forms is in line with the processes used for other providers.
- The role of the awarding bodies needs to be clarified. More uniformity is needed in what is acceptable to the Awarding Bodies so that this fits with the co-ordinated approach in the new framework.
- There is a real lack of realistic and relevant benchmarking data available.

- Benchmarking data needs to include qualitative and quantitative information - valued added/distance travelled.
- Any benchmarking should aim to measure like against like and must be clear.
- Providers stated that the key issue to be addressed in developing common measures and evidence portfolios is the need for consistency and standardisation.

RESPONSES TO QUESTIONS 8 & 9

Q. Do the proposed performance indicators provide an appropriate base to assess quality and continuous improvement effectively?

Q. In what circumstances are published comparative performance information and benchmarking helpful in raising standards? Are there circumstances where such information should not be published?

- More than seventy percent of respondents endorsed the four broad areas that performance indicators should address and considered that the publication of comparative performance information/benchmarking data would be effective in raising standards. However, many pointed to pitfalls or added caveats and health warnings. There was particularly strong concern about the need to achieve a level playing field across different types of providers and their associated client groups. Similarly, that value-added criteria should be taken into consideration when compiling performance information. Failure to adequately address such issues would, it was felt, run the risk of demoralising providers and their staff.
- A significant minority (around one in five) could not fully endorse the proposed performance indicators or their publication. In addition to the issues mentioned above, they cited concerns about the robustness of data, worries about data burdens (especially on smaller/specialist providers), and a fear that performance indicators and their publication might skew provider behaviour in a way that would run counter to achieving the Learning and Skills Council's strategic objectives.
- The overriding opinion was that comparison and benchmarking should be on a 'like with like' basis and take into account the socio-economic factors that influence provider and/or learner performance. Publication and use of comparative or benchmarking data without supporting contextual information could create spurious comparisons, be misleading, be politically contentious and have a detrimental effect on provider or staff morale.
- There was strong consensus that performance information related to finance and commercial confidentiality should not be published.

Other circumstances where publication might justifiably be withheld were:

- providers under special measures
- where the provider/LSC are in dispute over a performance grading
- where providers are exhibiting serious weakness or other short-term special circumstances making for a poor performance, for example: major restructuring of the institution or major change of leadership.

Finally, most respondents limited their comments to specific dimensions or desirable properties of performance indicators, rather than suggest specific indicators. The exception was the identification of a need for value-added/distance-travelled measures to complement current achievement measures, thus allowing the full range of outcomes from post-16 learning to be captured.

RESPONSES TO QUESTIONS 11 & 12

Q. Should the current accredited and Beacon status of FE colleges be carried forward until the new arrangements are established?

Q. Do you agree that the award of preferred/approved provider status should be available across all types of providers?

ISSUES AND CONCERNS

The majority of respondents were in favour of the LSC having a means of recognising and rewarding top performers. However, a small number of people questioned the need for preferred provider status. Comments made included:

- why create a two tier system ?
- further bureaucracy;
- providers will be driven to achieve a quality mark rather than to drive up the quality of provision.

A point of general consensus was that the LSC should be up and running for at least 12-18 months before seeking to introduce preferred provider status. Respondents thought the suggested timescale will give the LSC the opportunity to build up relationships with providers and time for many of the underpinning arrangements for raising standards to become embedded.

CRITERIA AND EVIDENCE

- The criteria should be challenging and build on the criteria set for the approved status.
- Providers should have the same equality of opportunity to gain preferred provider status.
- The core criteria for preferred status should be achievable by all providers. Diversity of providers is vast therefore some of the criteria may need to be tailored/measured differently to reflect the nature of the provider's client group/provision/local needs.
- The criteria should not disadvantage providers who deal with harder to help client groups or small providers who might struggle to find the resources to apply for preferred status. Criteria should also take into account learning environments and expected outcomes against local needs.
- Inspection results should be a key determinant. The balance of provision being judged to be good or outstanding before providers could apply for preferred status.
- In addition to inspection results other criteria suggested included: retention rates, value added, distance travelled by learners, learner feedback, quality of provider personnel, financial probity, health and safety record, performance and benchmarking information.
- The criteria should focus on the quality of the learning experience and the individual not providers' structures and processes.
- The criteria, application process, timescales and awarding process for preferred provider needs to be transparent and understood by all.
- In examining evidence against the criteria the LSC should take into account sources of information from partner organisations (ES, QCA, awarding bodies) and/or achievements/quality standards held by providers. It should not look for providers to provide "War and Peace" sized evidence.

ARRANGEMENTS FOR EXISTING FEFC ACCREDITED COLLEGES

- Colleges which have achieved accredited status under the current FEFC arrangements should continue to be recognised by the LSC until its own preferred provider arrangements are in place.
- Once the LSC becomes operational there should be no new accredited colleges under the current FEFC arrangements.
- Transition arrangements need to be developed for FEFC accredited colleges . For example will existing FEFC accredited colleges see any benefits under the transition arrangements?

MAIN BENEFITS ATTACHED TO PREFERRED PROVIDER STATUS

- **Benefits to the provider** - security of funding and longer term contracts; potentially lighter touch monitoring, audit and inspection; enhanced influence with the LSC, and credibility within the post-16 market.
- **Benefits to the LSC** - enhanced partnership relationships with preferred providers and preferred providers would help inform strategic thinking at local level.
- **Benefits to the learner** – can be assured that learning will be of a high quality; informed decision making and greater level of consistency across the provider marketplace.

AWARD OF STATUS

- As local LSC's will be the main contacts with providers they must make the decision against national criteria. (Some respondents thought the national LSC should have a moderating role.)
- A mechanism for appeal to the national LSC is required to ensure equity of treatment.

NATIONAL AND MULTI-SITE PROVIDERS

- The view was expressed that before an organisation receives the award, checks should be made to ensure that all individual sites meet the criteria. If this is not the case then failing sites should be brought up to standard prior to the award being made.

TIMESCALES FOR INTRODUCTION

- Preferred provider status should not be rolled out until 2002 as there needs to be a period of development of the relationship between the LSC and providers, 12–18 months was suggested.

PERIOD OF AWARD

- The status should last indefinitely but be reviewed by the LSC on an annual basis to ensure the standard is being maintained.
- Problems identified should be openly discussed and a development plan with clearly defined actions and milestones agreed. The LSC would then review and act accordingly.

OTHER POINTS ARISING FROM DISCUSSIONS

- If preferred provider status is introduced there needs to be a balance between the criteria used to assure quality, the bureaucratic requirements and the costs to the provider seeking to achieve the status.

- Currently there are problems with the language and definitions used by ES, DfEE and inspectorates in developing the new arrangements. Must try to use a common language; common systems and common criteria.
- Providers will need help and support. Consideration needs to be given to resource implications for all parties involved.
- The current provider market is very competitive. The LSC will need to ensure an even playing field for all and that good practice is shared and disseminated.

RESPONSES TO QUESTIONS 13 & 14

Q. In what circumstances would it be appropriate for the LSC or ES to invest resources to improve marginal or unsatisfactory provision? How should this be done and how should such investments be safeguarded?

Q. What type of support should the LSC and ES provide to encourage new developments and collaboration to improve learning opportunities and the efficiency and effectiveness of delivery?

ISSUES AND CONCERNS

- The general view expressed was that the LSC should have a single standards fund for post-16 learning which the LSC can use flexibly.
- Use of the fund should be guided by a framework including local and national priorities and that approval and monitoring should be based on action plans tailored to individual projects.
- The criteria used for awarding and measurement should be the impact on the learner.

USES FOR STANDARDS FUNDS

The areas which can contribute most to quality, and which should, therefore, be priorities for use of standards funds are:

- improving provider staff skills
- sharing expertise and good practice
- providing access to shared resources

Additional possible uses of the fund included:

- Investing in up to date technology, particularly helpful to small providers
- Focusing investment on the generic weaknesses in training identified via inspections
- Supporting action planning pre and post inspections

MODELS FOR FUTURE OF PRESENT STANDARDS FUNDS

- The preferred model is a common Standards Fund for the whole of post-16, to be deployed flexibly by each local LSC. Other options include segmenting funds between sectors and objectives as in the current FEFC model, but this reduces flexibility, effectiveness and value for money and increases bureaucracy.

CRITERIA FOR STANDARDS FUND INVESTMENTS

- Investment decisions need to be driven by a combination of the needs of the learner and the findings of inspection and self-assessment.

- When the investment is made it may vary, e.g. in the case of a new provider it could be “up front”.
- To promote continuous professional development, the money could either be invested in the individual or alternatively awarded to the employer who would then allocate as part of a development plan.
- If a provider is deemed to be delivering poor provision will this be viewed negatively or alternatively will this be viewed as a priority?

CONTROL SYSTEMS FOR STANDARDS FUND INVESTMENTS

- Industrial practice shows that a clearly defined quality system enables efforts to be targeted accurately. Quality standards and improvement standards need to be defined.
- How outcomes are measured is important. There needs to be a value added measure and this needs to be defined. Key indicators need to be agreed with flexibility to allow for a wider criteria e.g. social inclusion. ES and the LSC will need to agree common factors, some of which may need to be weighted.
- Bureaucracy should be kept to a minimum. The focus should be on results and set in terms of achievement. The funding organisation will need to work with the provider in monitoring progress towards stated goals.
- Need to avoid duplication of effort where a provider serves more than one local LSC or where an employer is involved with a number of providers covering more than one sector.

PLANNING STANDARDS FUND INVESTMENTS

- There needs to be clear quality/standard targets and long term evaluation of the effects of investments in quality/standards.
- Providers’ and employers’ business plans look ahead and include action plans therefore the LSC will need to provide clear and timely information on what is available to support standards.
- The need for flexibility in meeting emerging and changing needs.
- The need for benchmarking information to be made available.
- Provider action plans need to cover relationships and requirements of the full range of partners e.g. NTOs and awarding bodies, not just the LSC.

RESPONSIBILITIES

- Providers could match LSC resources invested in standards “in kind” by contributing time and expertise. Small providers may have no other resources with which to match.
- Quality is primarily the responsibility of the provider and the push should come from the provider. The standards fund can help providers but the LSC cannot “do quality” for them.
- Some providers selling point to employers is that they, the provider will handle everything taking the burden off the employer. However, this will need to be re-packaged and sold as a business opportunity for the employer.

RESPONSES TO QUESTION 15

Q. What additional support is needed during the transition to help providers prepare for the introduction of the new arrangements for raising standards in post-16 learning?

- The main requests were for as much information as possible about the changes to be communicated as soon as possible to enable providers to prepare for change, together with an early indication of the key national benchmarks to help providers set their own targets. It was also pointed out that the shift of emphasis to outreach as part of widening participation, social inclusion and development of basic skill achievement levels needed to be properly costed with realistic targets.
- There were also requests for financial underpinning or guarantees for work based providers to support them through the transition, as for FE colleges and schools, in particular for help with capital investment in new computer hardware and software for new Individual Learner Records.
- Many respondents asked for launch seminars, roadshows, sector-based sub-regional meetings and local briefings along with a telephone helpline for on-going support.
- Closer links with the Inspectorates were urged by several respondents. Current good practice should continue into the LSC era with a policy of encouraging LSC staff to be associate inspectors (inspecting only those providers with whom their LSC did not hold a local contract). Also there should be assistance with building the 'provider nominee' role, currently related to inspection, into a continuing 'quality champion' role.
- And to follow a desire for a period of stability.

RESPONSE TO QUESTIONS RAISED IN RESPECT OF THE EMPLOYMENT SERVICE

Q. Conference delegates were asked to consider the proposed design of the quality framework and ES's focus on jobs to highlight the implications for ES providers.

ISSUES AND CONCERNS

Overall respondents were supportive of the design principles and felt that they supported the aim of the ES. However the following concerns and issues were raised in the conference workshops:

NEW ADULT PROGRAMME

- Providers need details of the new adult programme replacement for WBLA.
- Will the new adult programme be a national programme or will it operate with the existing regional flexibility?
- All clients on all types of provision should work towards an Individual Training Plan.
- Output Related Funding (ORF) does not always drive up quality of provision, there needs to be a balance with On Programme Payments (OPPs).
- How do job outcomes fit in with the Government's commitment to lifelong learning?
- Jobs vs. Training: How can retention in learning be achieved when somebody has started work?
- Qualifications: Will there be the opportunity to mix and match units of NVQs?
- Profiling and target setting should be applied systematically and sympathetically.

- Job outcome is not the only desirable outcome as some learners lack relevant social skills - need to look at distance travelled.
- Build on what works well in New Deal.
- ES Advisers and Providers should be able to share information.

LSC & ES AND OTHER PARTNER RELATIONSHIPS

- More information on how ES will work with LSC is needed.
- ES and Providers should be working towards the same targets.
- The need for LSC and ES to develop coherent systems. Where the system is not coherent there should be good reasons why.
- There should be a common understanding between ES and LSC staff when dealing with providers.
- Quality needs to be across the piece.

QUALITY/REVIEW PROCESS

- Providers supportive of self-assessment as it is seen as an effective tool.
- Providers want to work to one set of Quality Standards & Inspection Framework.
- Performance is key to quality, rather than simply measuring quantity.
- There needs to be a commitment to work with providers to drive up quality through action planning, development plans and on-going dialogue.
- The need to reduce bureaucracy.

APPROVED PROVIDER STATUS

- Providers in the group were supportive of the ES approved provider process as there is a need for competition to drive up quality.
- Providers will require constructive feedback on why they have not met the quality standards in order for them to re-apply.

TRANSITIONAL ISSUES

- Providers need to be aware of the timing of the introduction of the new contracts and transitional arrangements.
- What will happen about electronic transfer of data under the new system?

OTHER ISSUES

In addition to the issues and concerns discussed in the consultation workshops the following points were made in the written responses to the consultation document:

- It is important to emphasise the importance of choice for the learner and the employer. There needs to be healthy competition to encourage better quality.
- The proposals favour certain providers at the expense of others.
- One of key design principles should state providers have the main responsibility for raising standards.
- Need more information on how good practice is to be identified and disseminated. Also, how this will be used to 'build on what works best'.

- The proposal to partner new providers with existing providers may lead to a conflict of interest particularly where the new provider is competing for the same client group within the same geographical area.
- What monitoring strategies would be in place for those providers without a proven track record in the first year of the contract?
- How will value for money be measured?
- More detail is required such as the definition of firm action when improvements are not achieved within a reasonable timescale.

Copies of this publication can be obtained from:

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Please quote ref: P16 RSC Consultation Report

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