

LEARNING PARTNERSHIPS - PROGRESS REPORT - SEPTEMBER 2000

This paper provides a progress update on Learning Partnerships and outlines the issues facing them.

Progress in establishing Learning Partnerships

Network

1. The network of Learning Partnerships (101) remains unchanged. Because of the LSC developments, Partnerships are continuing to consider boundary issues and structures to ensure that they have the necessary local focus to work effectively with the local LSCs. Government Offices are continuing to facilitate regional networking and are working with Partnerships to develop effective electronic (Internet) links. A recurrent issue being raised by Partnerships and others is the need for a national body to represent them, particularly now that the LSC is beginning to take shape. *The Group are invited to give views on the need for such a body and how it might be established.*

Membership

2. Partnerships are continuing to broaden their base to include the range of key partners with an interest in education and training. We are in the process of updating information on individual Partnership membership and structures and this will be available for the next meeting of the Group. Current information on the typically "under-represented" groups shows membership as follows:

Voluntary & Community bodies - 52% (previously 48%)

Training Providers - 44% (previously 40%)

Trade Unions - 36% (previously 32%)

Churches - 20% (previously 19%)

3. We know however that in many cases these groups and many others are involved in Learning Partnership activities through sub-group and/or projects and initiatives supported by the Partnership.

Targets

4. All Partnerships now have targets for young people and virtually all have agreed adult targets with Government Offices. This continues to be a critical area for Learning Partnerships' work through this year and next.

Funding

5. The Partnership Fund is £10million in the current financial year, £4m to support the infrastructure and £6m for projects or “action”. Preliminary findings from the national evaluation study indicate that a critical success factor is the existence of a dedicated partnership manager. The majority of Partnerships now have or are recruiting managers/co-ordinators either using the “support” element of the Fund, or resources provided by partners.
6. Partnerships are using the remainder of their funding (action element) to help meet their key objectives, to prepare for the new post-16 arrangements, including advising the local LSCs and Connexions service, and to undertake their new responsibilities of establishing consultative mechanisms.

Partnerships in Practice

7. Partnerships are becoming increasingly engaged in a wide range of local learning initiatives/projects and collaborative activities linked to the objectives set out in their Learning Plans.
8. In addition to the range of activities outlined in the last Progress Report, Learning Partnerships are starting to focus on establishing consultative mechanisms to capture the views and opinions of learners and potential learners - both young and old - and ensuring that they have a real influence on the quality of future provision.
9. Following Area Inspections of 16-19 provision in a number of areas during this year, Learning Partnerships in the relevant area have been asked to consider issues raised in the reports and in particular to address issues around collaboration across sectors. Whilst no two Partnerships are the same, there are some broad similarities emerging, for example:
 - the larger shire county Partnerships are each tending to develop district sub-structures of one sort or another with the intention to link into the Best Value Review Community Planning processes;
 - in most cases, the Partnerships are intrinsically connected into regeneration partnerships and activities, often providing the lead for learning related developments and projects;
 - the Learning Partnership providing the umbrella organisation for the Connexions local management committee and/or the Connexions Partnership;
 - most Partnerships are developing effective linkages to other key partnerships such as the early Years Development and Childcare Partnerships, Education Business Partnerships, etc.

10. There are also a number of added value dimensions that the Partnerships have been able to bring. Many cite the fact that partners are now all communicating effectively with one another as a significant plus factor. Other dimensions include Partnerships developing a co-ordinated and strategic approach to funding bids; the Partnership providing an honest broker/facilitative role which all partners find acceptable; developing trust and building relationships through the need for lead partners for externally funded partnerships projects, and, importantly; the Partnership proactively discussing and in some cases, agreeing, how it will fill gaps left by the removal of the TEC.

Guidance

11. The following documents have recently been issued to learning Partnerships:
 - i) *Priorities and Performance - A Guide to Positive Evaluation* - which provides Partnerships with advice about self-evaluation methods and how it dovetails with regional/national evaluation arrangements;
 - ii) *Consultative Fora - Good Practice for Learning Partnerships* - the findings of research undertaken by the national evaluators to support Learning Partnerships and Careers Services which outlines some ideas, examples, key issues and good practice in relation to the implementation of consultative mechanisms.
12. We are also in the process of revising and updating *Information and Guidance for Learning Partnerships* (January 2000) for re-issue this Autumn which will include more detail on the nature of Partnerships' relationship with local LSCs. In addition, Professor Mike Campbell (Leeds Metropolitan University) has been commissioned to develop generic guidance for Learning Partnerships on effective partnership working.

Partnership Events

13. A consultation event "Local Learning Partnerships: making their mark in 2000" took place at Windsor Castle at the end of August. The event generated some very interesting food for thought on how local Learning Partnerships can best make their mark when the new post-16 arrangements are introduced. About a quarter of Learning Partnerships and half the Government Offices attended. *A copy of the report is attached for information.*
14. A workshop/brainstorming event "Learning Partnerships - Shaping The Future" involving nine of the "better" Learning Partnerships will take place on 29th September in Birmingham. The aim is to generate some creative thinking around partnership management and leadership and the contribution Learning Partnerships can make in future, particularly in respect of their relationship with local LSC and Connexions Partnerships. Findings from this event will feed into the national co-ordinators conference.
15. A national conference directed at Learning Partnership managers/co-ordinators will be held in Coventry on 30th & 31st October 2000. The conference will look at a wide

range of issues and initiatives affecting Partnerships. It will cover the development of the LSC and will enable delegates to consider how Partnerships might work effectively with the new body. The event will also offer a valuable opportunity for networking and sharing of current practice.

Evaluation

16. Phase 2 of the evaluation by York Consulting Ltd, a review of partnership/ collaborative processes, is currently underway. *Progress and findings to date will be covered under agenda item 5.*
17. The majority of fact-finding visits to selected Learning Partnerships by Kevin Brady and other members of the Learning Partnerships team have now been completed. These visits have explored interesting points in the Learning Plans, identified common/good practice, and allowed discussion of issues surrounding LSCs and Connexions. *Kevin will provide members with an update on these visits at the meeting.*
18. A research project by DfEE's Quality & Financial Assurance Division (QFAD) focussing on the readiness of Learning Partnerships to engage with LSCs is now underway. Fieldwork is due to be completed by early October.

Action

19. **Members of the Learning Partnership Group are invited to:**
 - **note the progress made on Learning Partnerships and comment on developments in their respective areas;**
 - **identify future developments that will impact on Learning Partnerships;**
 - **give their views on the need for a national network/body to represent Learning Partnerships.**

**Learning Partnerships Team
September 2000**