

LEARNING PARTNERSHIPS – THE WAY AHEAD

This paper considers the future role of Learning Partnerships and sets out how DfEE, with the help of Government Offices, plans to support them over the next twelve months.

Introduction

1. Learning Partnerships are now well established and are working to the Remit issued by DfEE and national partners in January 1999. Although this Remit is still largely valid, Partnerships need to assert their position in the new post-16 arrangements and, in particular, to clarify and build their relationship with the LSC.
2. In a recent letter to all Learning Partnerships, Malcolm Wicks stated that he wanted them “ *to enable local communities to have a genuine say in shaping learning provision by representing the views and needs of local people and businesses to the LSC. By bringing together key local interests the Learning Partnerships can help ensure that learning becomes more relevant, cost effective and responsive to need.*” He also said that “*Over the next two years, I will look to Learning Partnerships to build upon the progress they have made so far and to continue to bring greater coherence and co-ordination to the learning offered by local providers.*”

The Role of Learning Partnerships

3. Learning Partnerships are a key part of the new post-16 arrangements providing a crucial local focus to the planning and delivery of learning and guidance, and an effective forum for local collaboration. Their role in the new arrangements has been set out in broad terms in a number of publications including the Learning to Succeed White Paper and the Learning and Skills Council Prospectus. More specifically their role can be defined in terms of three core objectives:
 - to deliver greater provider **collaboration** on the range of provision, its delivery and its standards so learning becomes more coherent, relevant and accessible to local people and employers;
 - to encourage providers to work collectively, with users to identify local learner, community and employer **needs** and to respond to them through their own actions and by influencing local LSCs; and
 - to help ensure that effective mechanisms are in place to provide **feedback** on the quality and accessibility of learning to providers and the LSC from both young people and adults, especially through learner forums.

These objectives have been endorsed by Ministers and the LSC.

Relationship with the LSC

4. At its last meeting, the group had a substantive discussion on the expected working relationship between local LSCs and Learning Partnerships. Following further discussions with key partners, including some Learning Partnerships and the LSC, we have produced guidance that describes the nature of the relationship and provides a framework for use in drawing up local agreements. The guidance also includes example case studies illustrating joint LSC/Learning Partnership action to deliver basic skills training in the workplace and to rationalise vocational provision for 16-19 year olds. A copy is at [Annex 1](#).

5. This guidance, which has been endorsed by Ministers, has been issued to Learning Partnerships by DfEE. The LSC is issuing identical guidance to local Executive Directors. We know that many Learning Partnerships and local LSCs are using this guidance and some have already drawn up local agreements or “memoranda of understanding”. We also know that some have not yet entered into constructive dialogue and are some way from developing a mutual understanding of their relationship.

Priorities for 2001-02

6. During the year 2000, Learning Partnerships consolidated their position and worked to make practical progress - in particular by establishing mechanisms to enable feedback from young people and adults to have a real influence on future provision. It is important that Learning Partnerships continue to improve local co-ordination and collaboration and to look, where necessary, at the rationalisation of provision within their areas. Among the key challenges facing them during 2001-02 are:

- i) **continuing progress towards the achievement of agreed local learning targets in line with the National Learning Targets.** If we are to achieve the 2002 Targets (particularly the Level 2 target), it is vital that Learning Partnerships continue to deliver against action plans, promoting learning and creating a climate locally that will help to increase participation in learning, tackle drop-out and raise standards and attainment;

- ii) **ensuring effective mechanisms are in place for consulting young people and adults.** Many partners have already established means of consulting with young people and adults in the community. Learning Partnerships are discussing with partners the best ways of drawing upon effective existing arrangements and supplementing them to ensure full and wide coverage;

- iii) **helping to drive up the quality of learning provision in their areas, in particular by addressing issues arising from Area Inspections of 16-19 provision.** Learning Partnerships have a key role in supporting the development of 16-19 area inspection action plans in the context of their wider responsibilities for lifelong learning. They are becoming increasingly involved, not only in developing these action plans, but also acting in some cases as coordinating body for the whole inspection process;

- iv) **contributing to local neighbourhood renewal strategies and, in particular, ensuring that Learning Partnerships have the capacity to provide the learning and skills input to local strategic partnerships (LSPs).** With local LSCs, Learning Partnerships will effectively form the “learning arm” or sub group of the new LSPs, ensuring that learning and skills issues are fully integrated into both LSPs’ priorities and Local Authorities’ community strategies;

- v) **promoting and marketing learning to different audiences.** It is important that Learning Partnerships continue to raise awareness of their role and promote learning within their communities, particularly to employers and to individuals currently excluded from learning. Partnerships are continuing to use their unique position as representatives

of the full range of lifelong learning interests to promote the value and benefits of learning and the opportunities for progression to individuals and businesses across local communities;

vi) **developing further inclusive links with grass root partners and clients and continuing to share local information and plans.** Local partners are communicating more effectively with one another as a result of working together in a Learning Partnership. Many Partnerships are developing a co-ordinated and strategic approach to bidding for funds and providing a facilitative “honest broker” role which all partners find acceptable. They are increasingly attracting substantial additional funding into the area through joint bidding.

Further Development and Support

7. Learning Partnerships should all be clear about their important and continuing role and DfEE's and the LSC's commitment to them. We need now to consider what further support they need to help them carry out their role and meet the challenges set out above. We know from interim findings of the national evaluation that Partnerships are at varied stages of development, reflecting both past history and local circumstances and that they have tended to concentrate on operational activity rather than strategic issues.
8. In addition to the £10m Partnership Fund, among the activities that DfEE, working closely with GOs, plans to support Learning Partnerships over the next twelve months are:
 - the issue of revised **Information and Guidance for Learning Partnerships**. The guidance to Learning Partnerships, first published in January 2000, has been updated to provide current information on the full range of their responsibilities and priorities. This revised guidance also clarifies the critical role of Learning Partnerships in the light of the establishment of the LSC and its local arms. It is currently available on the DfEE website at <http://www.lifelonglearning.co.uk/lip/> and will be distributed in hard copy to Learning Partnerships, local LSCs and other organisations at the end of May;
 - a collection of **good practice case studies** to be disseminated to all Partnerships during June. The Learning Partnerships evaluation website also provides an ongoing facility for Partnerships to share good practice;
 - **a series of Demonstration Projects** focusing on a number of key themes including rationalisation, widening participation, working with schools and higher education and improving student support arrangements. The aim of these projects is to identify Learning Partnerships that have one or more of these themes as priority action areas and that are already starting to develop some innovative activities and initiatives that, with a little additional funding, could develop as exemplars;
 - **a monthly Newsletter for Learning Partnerships** sent electronically to provide direct communication on key policy issues, good practice and news from across the region. The newsletter complements the website and existing communication from Government Offices to Partnerships;
 - **ad-hoc events focusing on key themes/issues** for example, the recent series of workshops focusing on Neighbourhood Renewal and Basic Skills;
 - **a further national conference for Learning Partnership Managers and Chairs** to be held in October/November 2001. The conference will again focus

on a range of issues and initiatives affecting Learning Partnerships and will offer another valuable opportunity for networking and sharing of current practice;

- **continued regional networking** supported by Government Offices including working with Partnerships to develop effective electronic links through, for example, dedicated websites; and
- **targeted support**, again provided by GOs, to less developed Partnerships including work with those who have previously been heavily reliant on TEC/CCTE support.

Action

9. Members of the Learning Partnership Group are invited to:

- **comment on current and future developments that will impact on Learning Partnerships, particularly in working with the LSC;**
- **offer ideas/suggestions for a further national conference to take place later in the year.**

Learning Partnerships Team
May 2001

LOCAL LEARNING AND SKILLS COUNCILS AND LEARNING PARTNERSHIPS WORKING TOGETHER

PURPOSE

1. The purpose of this guidance is to provide local Learning and Skills Councils (LSCs) and local Learning Partnerships with the basis for local agreements. It is not prescriptive, but is designed to help cultivate a mutual understanding of roles and responsibilities thereby enabling the development of a productive working relationship between the two bodies. The framework it describes (at paragraphs 6-12) recognises the essentially voluntary and independent nature of Learning Partnerships - as outlined in the original Learning Partnerships Remit (issued January 1999) and subsequent published guidance - and the fact that the overall relationship between the two bodies is non-contractual¹ and non-hierarchical in nature. Each local LSC chair/Executive Director and Learning Partnership chair may wish to formalise their relationship by signing up to a local "concordat" or "memorandum of understanding" based on the framework described in this guidance; they are encouraged to do so.

INTRODUCTION

2. The concept of Learning Partnerships stems from a joint commitment - by central government and the representative bodies of the local government, further education, work-based training, adult and community learning, and youth support sectors - to the establishment of a single strategic body in each area bringing together all existing local partnership arrangements covering post-16 and lifelong learning.
3. As voluntary groupings of the key post-16 providers and users in a local area their role is distinct from - but complementary to - that of local LSCs, which are demand-led and are purchasers of publicly-funded learning.
4. This framework covers the key areas in which Learning Partnerships and the LSC have a common interest. It brigades aspects of the local LSC/Partnership relationship into three broad areas; each of which reflects one of the three core roles of Learning Partnerships. Those roles are:
 - to deliver greater provider collaboration on the range of provision, its delivery and its standards so learning becomes more coherent, relevant and accessible to local people and employers;
 - to encourage providers to work collectively, with users, to identify local learner, community and employer needs and to respond to them through their own actions and by influencing local LSCs; and
 - to help ensure that effective mechanisms are in place to provide feedback on the quality and accessibility of learning to providers and the LSC from both young people and adults, especially through learner fora.

Under each heading the framework suggests some examples of issues that Learning Partnerships and local LSCs may wish to include in their local agreements; there may be others.

5. Attached as an annex are two example scenarios intended to illustrate how local LSCs and Learning Partnerships can work together in practice to address real issues.

¹ Although there is no generic formal contract between the two bodies, individual contracts may be raised for particular items of work

FRAMEWORK

Collaboration and Rationalisation

6. In his remit letter to the LSC, the Secretary of State for Education and Employment set out his expectation that, in its relationship with Learning Partnerships, the LSC will “*draw on their in depth local knowledge, to support their drive for better co-ordination, and to work with them in promoting innovation*”.
7. Local LSCs and Partnerships are both working to ensure **better planning** of post-16 learning. Local LSCs will look to secure the best available provision for young people and adults based on demand, standards and value for money. Partnerships can improve co-ordination in the planning and delivery of local learning provision (including basic skills) by delivering better collaboration between providers and linking closely with other local groupings such as local strategic partnerships. In practical terms, Partnerships can help identify and pursue opportunities to eliminate duplication, needless competition and waste. Partnerships should be challenged to contribute to action plans following area inspections of 16-19 provision and to act collaboratively to implement the required changes. In doing so, they can provide advice to local LSCs and can facilitate joint local approaches to the development of more cost-effective, rationalised provision.
8. The LSC has a duty - working closely with providers and the Inspectorates - to secure high quality learning provision. Partnerships provide a forum for sharing and collating information from individual providers' quality assessment and feedback mechanisms. As a result, they can provide local LSCs with a grassroots view of the position on quality and the progress that is being made in **raising standards** across sectors locally. Partnerships can also support the LSC's commitment to promoting and ensuring **equality of opportunity** in terms of race, gender, disability and age.
9. **Increasing participation and achievement** and securing progress towards the **National Learning Targets** are priorities for both the LSC and Learning Partnerships. Local responsibility to maintain progress during the transition period will continue to be with Partnerships up to 2002 (i.e. beyond April 2001 when the LSC assumes its responsibilities for the Targets). It will be particularly important for Partnerships and local LSCs to focus on the key challenges in relation to the National Targets for achievement by young people, and the need to widen participation by adults in structured learning. Beyond 2002, when the LSC will advise Government on future targets, the two bodies will need to work closely together to promote learning and to define local action to achieve these new targets.

EXAMPLES

A typical local agreement might cover the following points :

- The Partnership will work to identify opportunities for collaboration and rationalisation that will improve the learning opportunities for individuals; the LSC will engage the Partnership in developing and implementing plans to rationalise provision.
- The Partnership will agree with the local LSC how it will contribute to improving provision in response to inspection reports, particularly Area Inspection reports, including agreeing and implementing action plans with the local LSC to address the issues raised and collect/share examples of best practice.
- The Partnership will work to help ensure that a wide range of learning opportunities is provided which meets local needs and demands, and provide reasonable access (physical access, access to the curriculum and to support); it will raise issues with the local LSC about how arrangements for provision are impacting on equal opportunities. The Partnership may lead a collaborative approach to student support arrangements (e.g. tuition fees, remission policies, access funds, transport and additional learning support) in order to develop a consistent, coherent and equitable model of entitlement for all learners across the area.

- The local LSC will provide the Partnership with good quality intelligence on progress towards Learning Targets, including those for basic skills, and provide early warning of potential shortfalls.
- The local LSC and the Partnership will develop complementary marketing and promotion strategies in order to “sell” the benefits of lifelong learning more effectively to individuals and employers.
- The local LSC will consult the Partnership on priorities and proposals for use of discretionary funding within the Partnership area. The local LSC may wish to contract with the Partnership to co-ordinate particular local collaborative learning projects and innovation.

Identifying and Responding to Needs

10. Local LSCs and Partnerships both need **intelligence on local needs** in order to fulfil their respective remits and it is vital that they share the information each has available. Local LSCs need good quality information on existing and planned learning provision (including advice and guidance), on the learning needs of individuals and communities, and on the skill needs of employers. Clearly, without such information, local LSCs will be unable to fund provision that is relevant and responsive to need. Partnerships have a key role through providers and local users identifying local learner and community needs, for example in the areas of adult and community learning, and by providers collaborating to respond to them both through their own actions and by influencing local LSCs. This is why the LSC remit requires local LSCs to “*consult the Learning Partnerships on their plans*”.

EXAMPLES

A typical local agreement might cover the following points :

- The local LSC will provide the Partnership with sub-regional/regional information on skill needs and priorities, while the Partnership will provide the local LSC with the local demand and supply-side intelligence to which it has access.
- In order to inform its own planning process, the local LSC will invite the Partnership to discuss annually the needs of the local area and will take account of the views and advice of the Partnership in drawing up its own plans.
- The Partnership will engage the local LSC as a key stakeholder in the consultative process leading to the production of its own local learning plan to deliver the National Learning Targets for 2002.

Feedback from Learners

11. Partnerships are responsible for ensuring that effective mechanisms are in place to provide **feedback from both young people and adults** on the quality, availability and relevance of learning provision, for example working closely with the Connexions Service in respect of young people. These will build on established student consultation arrangements in, for example, colleges. The LSC remit requires local LSCs to “*work with them* [Learning Partnerships] *to develop mechanisms for taking account of the views of potential learners and non-learners*”.

EXAMPLES

A typical local agreement might cover the following points :

- The Partnership will provide the local LSC with feedback from learners, employers and communities on their views of local education and training provision including quality and relevance.
- The local LSC may contract with the Partnership to provide funding to extend the scope of its feedback mechanisms, and/or to pursue other methods of engaging with learners/communities.

Underpinning Relationship

12. In pursuing their common interests across the above three areas, Partnerships and local LSCs will need to cultivate close and effective working relationships that underpin all aspects of their work. It will be important, in particular, to establish regular, ongoing communication.

EXAMPLES

A typical local agreement might cover the following points :

- The Partnership will invite the local LSC Executive Director to attend Partnership meetings as an observer while, for its part, the local LSC will undertake to attend such meetings wherever possible.
- The local LSC and Partnership will ensure that there is effective and regular communication throughout the year, e.g. by scheduling joint meetings at key points during the planning cycle.
- In reviewing its constitution, structure and/or boundaries on an ongoing basis, the Partnership will involve the local LSC in its deliberations.

LOCAL LSCs AND LEARNING PARTNERSHIPS WORKING TOGETHER : EXAMPLE SCENARIOS

This annex describes two hypothetical scenarios in which a Learning Partnership and a local LSC work together to develop and implement action to address local priorities. These examples draw on activities that are currently taking place and demonstrate the different contributions a Learning Partnership and a local LSC can make to the development of local solutions to local problems.

Scenario 1 - Basic Skills in the Workplace

The Problem

The Regional Development Agency (RDA) has identified a deficit in basic skills among local employees in its region. This is confirmed as a particular issue in the main city in the Learning Partnership area through individual partners' contacts with local employers.

Identifying the Issues

- Having first liaised with the local LSC, the Partnership conducts a quick, rough and ready audit of existing provision, with all the individual partners sharing information about their respective activities.
- The Partnership then submits a bid to the RDA for funding from the regional Skills Development Fund to carry out a more in-depth research project into the extent of the problem amongst local companies. The research exercise identifies, amongst other things, a particular problem with numeracy skills in clerical and customer service staff in small businesses in the financial services sector which is a key sector in the local economy.
- The Partnership works with these businesses and with Chambers of Commerce, larger employers in the sector (e.g. banks), Trade Unions and the relevant National Training Organisation, to develop a range of strategies to address the identified needs. Those strategies build on the experience of an existing example of innovative practice identified by the initial information sharing exercise. That involved one partner organisation which works with a range of small employers locally in their own premises, identifying employees' basic skills needs and developing solutions that employers feel comfortable with. The process integrates basic skills training into a range of development and social activities within the companies, including in-house training programmes, induction training, IT training and on-the-job training.
- The Partnership consults the local LSC Executive Director on its proposed strategies and develops an action plan that it presents to the local LSC Board.

Action

- Having secured the board's commitment, the local LSC implements the action plan, supported by the Partnership. They establish *learnirect* centres in ten of the small firms in the sector and, working closely with the appropriate employers, develop a network of linked companies whose employees can use the centres to access information about training. The centres are charged with promoting both their own services and the concept/benefits of basic skills within the companies.
- The local LSC supports a range of key providers including Ufl to link in to the *learnirect* centres and to deliver appropriate training in those companies to the new national standards for literacy and numeracy. This is done by writing the requirement into the formal funding agreements between the LSC and each provider.
- Learning Partnership members share ideas and good practice with each other and the local LSC thereby instigating further positive development and innovation.

Outcomes

- During the first year, 5,000 employees from 150 small and medium-sized companies (at least half in the financial services sector but also from a range of other sectors including manufacturing) use the centres. Most of these are from the city, but around 20% are from surrounding small towns and villages. 3,000 of these undertake some form of basic skills training within the national core curriculum and around 2,000 achieve Level 1 and 2 qualifications in the National Tests. 70% of these employees would not otherwise have been in structured learning.
- The experience of collaboration between providers to get closer to employers starts to spread into other occupational areas. The range of learning opportunities offered locally becomes more coordinated and, consequently, more relevant and appropriate to the needs of employees.
- Using its Partnership Funding from DfEE, the Learning Partnership funds the production of a tool kit for numeracy skills provision in the financial services sector, which is disseminated across the region through local LSCs and the RDA, and more widely in the sector through the NTO.

Scenario 2 – Increasing Attainment in Vocational Qualifications

The Problem

An Area Inspection of 16-19 provision in the Learning Partnership area identifies a lack of co-ordination in the delivery of vocational learning which it believes is discouraging young people from entering or staying in college courses and work-based training.

Identifying the Issues

- The local LSC considers the findings from the Area Inspection and seeks views from the Learning Partnership on how to develop more co-ordinated vocational provision.
- The Learning Partnership and the LSC set up a joint task group to map current provision (in schools, colleges, work place, community etc.) and seek the views of employers. It finds that there is a poor match between sectoral/occupational provision and the changing employment base and skill requirements of the area. There is unhelpful competition among many of the providers of GNVQ and NVQ training which has resulted in a significant amount of wasteful duplication, small classes and low attendance. Many providers are using incentives such as free meals, travel cards and attendance bonuses to compete for students rather than concentrating their efforts on improving the quality of the learning experience. In addition, many employers complain of uncoordinated and competing requests for work placements.
- The Partnership works with the youth forums in the area (established by the Connexions Service working as a member of the Learning Partnership) to seek the views of a range of young people. Those consulted include young people currently undertaking vocational courses, those not in education and training, and those aged 14 and over in schools. A range of issues emerges about the quality and relevance of training, the equipment available, practical application and the quality of work placements. Representatives of the forums present their views to the Learning Partnership and the local LSC at a joint meeting.

Action

- The Partnership and local LSC agree to implement a joint action plan. The Learning Partnership works with the Education Business Link Organisation (EBLO) to co-ordinate work placements across the area. In turn, the EBLO works with employers, providers and students to develop tailored work placements and to improve the quality of the learning experience.
- The action plan identifies two specific sectors, manufacturing and tourism/leisure, where provision appears to be particularly inefficient. Consequently, the local LSC negotiates with those providers currently delivering skills training for those sectors and arranges for provision

to be concentrated in two Centres of Excellence, one for each sector and each based in a single FE college, working closely with private training providers and local employers. Both provide off-the-job training for Modern Apprentices and appropriate specialised training for students from the college concerned and from other colleges and schools in the area. They also provide part of the relevant vocational GCSE courses for 14-16 year olds in local schools.

- Learning Partnership members agree to set up ongoing joint planning processes through the mechanism of the Partnership itself, in order to avoid a continuation of the sort of inefficiencies identified through this exercise (duplication of provision, etc).

Outcome

- A year on year increase of around 5% in the number of young people achieving vocational qualifications at levels 2 and 3.
- Future benefits of joint provider planning including more coherent learner support arrangements resulting, ultimately, in increased participation, including improved staying-on rates in both vocational and academic learning.
- Greater and more constructive employer involvement in Key Stage 4 in local secondary schools, including better quality work placements for 15 year olds, achieved because of more consistent and coherent approach to provider/business relations (in particular, in terms of uniform work placement arrangements).