

East of England Regional Stakeholder Event Machinery of Government: The new Pre and Post 19 Landscape Meeting regional skills needs

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Contents

1	Questions and Issues – Discussion 1	2
1.1	Further Questions.....	4
2	Round Tale – Discussion 2	4
2.1	Pre - 19.....	4
2.1.1	How can local authorities best work ith providers?.....	4
2.1.2	How will changes affect delegates?	4
2.1.3	What ideas and solutions?.....	5
2.2	Post - 19	5
2.2.1	How can the SFA best operate?.....	5
2.2.2	How do you want to work with the SFA?	6
2.2.3	What ideas and solutions?.....	7

1 Questions and Issues – Discussion 1

QUESTION: What issues have the presentations raised for you?

- How are private sector employers engaged at national, regional and sub-regional level?
- What should we be doing to inform what is happening post 19? How can we streamline the strategy at LA?
- Clarity over funding of apprenticeships.
- Given the budget difficulties in Train to Gain and the wider system, is there really the capacity to deliver a truly demand-led system?
- What would a needs-managed system look like?
- ESF funded NEET programmes where will match funding come from.
- The system is coming across as very closed and bureaucratic.
- SFA ambition with two offices, how relate to each Sub Region and each locality.
- Are employers looking for formal qualifications or do they really need up skilling via short courses. Will the new QCF framework address this?
- How flexible is the process to accommodate the third sector and learners?
- How RDA will different funding streams work in future - LSC and.
- What will the relationship look like between the SFA and local authorities? This is not clear, especially as the current relationship is clear.
- We don't have any employment and skills boards in the east of England, how are we going to respond to demand?
- Employer representation on SRG's, Chamber of Commerce? EBP's? Sector Skills Councils? Who can cover the broad range of representation? There is no one voice of employers - how can this be achieved realistically? Do the new structures have the enthusiasm, capacity to this? May need private and public employer's panels.
- How are the needs of the voluntary and community sector being met, especially in the transition period?
- How are the needs of voluntary sector organisations, which work regionally, met in the new local authority system?
- How can the voluntary sector as an employer be represented on the planning groups, and who is on these groups anyway? How can the 3rd sector engage with the process?
- Skills Activism case study wind turbine technology.
- How will local skills needs be fed up into the commissioning process? And is there the robust evidence in existence at local level.
- Different approaches to commissioning in LAs and the DCSF Commissioning Support Programme - has this been considered and included in planning?
- Capacity in LA's - for collecting of intelligence, the other softer roles that the LSC do - still have to be done.
- Where is the remit for equality and opportunity of access in the new system?
- Will there be a more robust engagement with employers to identify sector skills needs particularly around qualifications? How will these cater for emerging sectors?
- Need clarity over language - FE sector is used to mean more than FE colleges.
- Speed of response - will it be there for sign off of any commissioning of delivery - sometimes needs to be done quite quickly when money becomes available.
- LA Adult role is SFA or LA the contracting body?
- Where does informal, lifelong learning fit and opportunities for people who face barriers to employment?
- No mention of gifted and talented.
- Concerns that EESCP is not sufficiently linked in to the local level.
- How do we maintain stability in the system when local government changes?
- Clarification of Lead authority and LA commissioning who does what in commissioning and when.
- No mention of geographical issues and problems of access in rural areas.

- Advice and Guidance for Adults who contracts?
- Current flexibility now for meeting individual needs - how will the new arrangements meet LLDD, vulnerable learners - how will choice be maintained? Is there a plan to bring forward high volume low cost demand led?
- Issues concerning geography - implications is that local employers needs will inform delivery, however many areas are on regional borders and this needs to be reflected.
- How will RPGs and SRGs ensure they have appropriate representation?
- If the political landscape changes, are the current plans likely to change, are there contingency plans?
- How and where are learners represented?
- What is future of adult Careers service and who lets the contracts and by when?
- We would like more info about adult advancement and guidance service.
- How do we effectively stimulate the demand for apprenticeships amongst young people? Especially given LA staff redundancies etc.
- Will the direction of travel continue with a change of govt?
- Is the new agency structure more government led than demand led?
- Linkage between different age groups and how can you get employers voice at all ages with developments. How do you develop and maintain the pathways of learning?
- Will it be more difficult for 3rd Sector providers to be accredited as they might not be able to evidence the track record?
- Will government ever trust providers sufficiently to give 3 year contracts? What will be the control levers?
- How do we ensure that good practice is shared and sustained across local provider networks? Especially given the split at 19.
- Do we have the ability to provide individualised arrangements for disabled individuals to ensure that they can stay in county and within integrated social and training approaches? This was previously managed with LSC discretionary funding.
- Local authority staff insecurity around the new arrangements.
- Where does informal adult learning and non-accredited learning sit?
- How will LAs and the National Apprenticeship service work together?
- Arrangements for SFA seem to lag behind those for YPLA.
- What will be put in place to ensure easy access to the third sector?
- Demand let- whose demand and what happens with limited budgets?
- What will the relationship be with the LA? This has been a productive relationship with LSC but will LAs want to intervene more, e.g. with curriculum?
- How might a change in government affect the new agencies?
- What is the longevity of Train to Gain?
- Ambition for safe landing severely undermined by concertinaing of deadlines.
- Schools and Colleges may view learner demand differently to what employers / LA's view. Different priorities and influences from parents could shape a school's view. Is the demand real? How do we manage this with longer term planning and structure? Need to raise the level of debate on this. How do you balance all stakeholders' needs?
- Why will individual learning accounts work this time?
- What is happening with elected members to educate them in the new systems?
- Voluntary sector representation has not been appropriate.
- Arrangements for ESF in this region need to reflect the more complex arrangements currently in existence. Particularly as new planning stage will be shortly on us.
- Will there be a reduction in funding for 19+ as money needed to support the increase in the school leaving age?
- Concerns that the third sector is not being fully understood and its needs and strengths as a provider taken into account.
- What are arrangements for small providers, will they get left out?
- How can we maintain existing LSC relationship within the new structures?

1.1 Further Questions

- The tension between mechanics and light-touch account management needs to be recognised?
- Will the Skills Funding Agency take forward sector compacts?
- ESF funding pre 19 - will ESF consortium move into the LA. Where does the monitoring sit?
- UK Voc reform changes coming in before 14 - 16 changes how will these be aligned?
- What will happen to EBP, young enterprise projects - as piecemeal and vulnerable? This could get missed. When will the funding come through? LA's are commissioning EBP arrangements currently - YA etc needs to be in the new contract specifications. Sept to mar '10 funding there in some but in other areas funding to July '10. Will the new contracts be longer - this is important and urgent.
- How will funding and commissioning work for LLDD? Much anxiety in LA currently as many LLDD initiatives are funded and managed regionally. How will this work transfer to each LA? Should SRG have a greater role in this?

2 Round Tale – Discussion 2

2.1 Pre - 19

2.1.1 How can local authorities best work with providers?

QUESTION: How can local authorities work best with providers and other partners locally - what are the opportunities and challenges?

- Working with disability partnerships in each authority.
- Providers need clear commissioning arrangements. Will QPF remain?
- LAs don't try to reinvent the wheel and work with individuals and organisations which are already there and build on best practice.
- Local government review could have an effect on some of the arrangements.
- LAs must value expertise of LSC staff transferring.
- Streamlined system needed with clear milestones. Huge opportunity for improving strategic commissioning - having better links with local economy - forming of ESB.
- How do senior managers know what is going on at the ground level? A lot of good work in small pockets - how does this get packaged / taken account of with the new strategy. E.g. hard to engage projects for example. In order to inform commissioning how will senior managers get to know about it?
- How inclusive are SRGs? Are WBL providers and HE represented in 14-19 partnerships?
- Evaluation of projects - impact assessments - trying to get principles of evaluation and joined up information very difficult. How will this link in with new LA framework.
- Will the new system provide an opportunity for more flexible targets?
- Time for opportunity - a lot of stakeholders that need to be realistically engaged who could support strategy. Need to improve how these organisations can be engaged at times / situations that meet their needs. LA's need to focus on getting the information and plans published.
- Difficult to say when funding runs out end of July 2009 (VCS).
- How can LAs ensure Children's Trust and Economic Development work together?

2.1.2 How will changes affect delegates?

QUESTION: How will the changes affect delegates? What do you need to do differently?

- What safeguards are there so that small or specialist providers are not left out?
- Difficult to say when funding runs out end July 09 (VCS).

- Tension between demand and supply led models needs to be recognised and will funding methodology fit the commissioning framework?
- Understanding new structures across LA boundaries and how we can interact with or support them.
- Training for senior managers in LA needed to up skill on KS5 changes and understanding the coming together of two/ three different cultures. E.g. Some LA's still have School Improvement Advisers should this now be Education Improvement Partners or departments to help that dovetailing of two systems together?
- What is defined as work shadowing - is this work experience? - Who are the LSC staff learning off or is it a two way process. Some LA staff is worried whether they will lose their jobs to get economies of scale. LSC 16 to 19 managers surely would need to be 14 -19 managers to get that synergy. Is this being addresses regionally?
- Need to be clear about what will be purchased. More commissioning and less allocation would lead to a greater alignment of funding to strategic priorities.

2.1.3 What ideas and solutions?

QUESTION: What ideas and solutions do you have for the challenges raised in session 1 (national, regional, local)?

- Key milestones needed for when range of funding can be released. Published on website regionally. Annual calendar of key events / when bids have to be in etc.
- Use DCSF 14-19 briefings for schools etc.
- Local labour market intelligence is crucial. Sector Skills Councils need to give more local intelligence.
- LA commissioners to have Learner focus groups to really understand what local learners want quality of their experience on their course / project / scheme and impact on their lives.
- LA needs to challenge 14-19 local partnerships to identify and justify appropriate curriculum not influenced by institutional self interest.
- Contracting processes historically based upon success rates etc - criteria needs to take account of what learners have got out of programme qualitative and quantitative data. LA will need to link to Ofsted Framework for Excellence results when focusing on new commissioning. Particularly for LLDD / vulnerable learners. Has been a focus for independent living skills before these learners can do anything else. There is a gap for those kids who did not get statement at school.
- Invest in good leaders for 14-19 partnerships to challenge providers to deliver for the benefit of all learners.
- Communication at strategic level is good but at operational level needs work.

2.2 Post - 19

2.2.1 How can the SFA best operate?

QUESTION: How can the Skills Funding Agency best operate locally and link with regional and local partners? What are the opportunities and challenges?

- Planning/strategy groups need to be required to involve third sector/employers on their board.
- National Office interaction with local partners/contracts?
- Maintain existing relationships and partnerships - utilise existing structures that have been successful e.g. for 3rd sector the consortia and regional infrastructure.
- Create local, regional and national forums where all stakeholders have the opportunity to influence SFA thinking and funding.
- Who would fund self-organised networks of providers?
- Local discretionary funding to respond to local needs so there is more flexibility.
- How can local self-organised networks be supported and driven?
- SFA lead person with each locality/County/Unitary` Geographic/thematic/sector.
- What is the scope for local discretionary funding?
- Where will current LSC funding for provider networks go?

- Ensure that local third sector bidding consortia are fully engaged in competitive bidding processes, and that procedures are simplified to allow them to bid.
- Need to create a structure/mechanism to gather local intelligence from employers, providers etc.
- Moving towards joint local outcome targets.
- Challenge for local authorities will be to get one voice within the authority to speak.
- Who will fill the void left by local LSC partnership teams?
- SFA must ensure they engage with existing networks and partnerships to identify whether they are fit for purpose and properly representative.
- JCP links regionally/sub region/local.
- Continuing with regional LSC equality and diversity groups.
- Ensure there is a clear role for trade unions.
- Difficulty to get one individual with the breadth of knowledge to understand across the pre and post 16 agenda.
- Need to ensure that the local authority commissioning contact has a good relationship with the SFA contract manager.
- Involve the employer skills board in funding decisions.
- Too many meetings a risk.
- Ensure there is a link with the national union learning fund.
- Need to pilot approaches, before set in stone - for example what employers are prepared to pay for.

2.2.2 How do you want to work with the SFA?

QUESTION: How do you want to work with the Skills Funding Agency - what could be improved; what lessons can be learned from working with the LSC.

- There has been a value in having local representation from the LSC. This micro level knowledge and opportunity for the LSC to provide champions of local or third sector issues has been very positive. We do not wish to see this lost.
- Individual involvement and passion key as well as relationships.
- Ensure equitable, simple and transparent procurement process.
- Keeping the improvement of the flexibilities in Train to Gain (with regards to volunteers, second qualifications, higher level).
- Manage expectations relations must be different.
- Certainty and continuity are important. No moving goal posts.
- Avoid increasing the cost and effort to make bids and administer contracts by ensuring that there is commonality between SFA, LA and NAS procurement and contract management processes.
- We want account management to reduce the boundaries and confusion that currently exist. There needs to be clearer performance management to ensure that account management can work.
- Accessibility will be key to ensuring providers, especially small providers, can work well with SFA.
- Don't lose the good things that the LSC have done e.g. dialogue at planning stages, supportive staff, local funding, some flexibility, and co-financing.
- Continue with integrated employment and skills services.
- Joint responsibility work together to establish relationship.
- Safeguard ESF co-financing arrangements.
- Clear, transparent and open hierarchy of networks accessible to all. Publication of map of networks.
- Move from output related funding to outcome related.
- LSP role in relationship.
- Review how providers are paid - infrastructure costs in delivery of contracts, delay in providers getting payment.
- Local authorities need to ensure they speak across the pre and post 19 divide, and approach YPLA and SFA with one voice.
- Better timescales for procurement, more efficient contracting, and think before you advertise - don't keep pulling things that people have worked on.

- We must ensure that the SSCs are able to deliver on the role they have been assigned.
- Common systems across procurement admin contracting etc.
- The framework for articulating skills demands needs to have clear responsibilities and roles. For instance RDAs/SFA.
- With the new system, who will bring stakeholders together to articulate skills demands? SFA?
- Will all colleagues in the system have one name to contact in the SFA, or will only providers have this?
- Take the opportunity to work closer with HEFCE so that the vocational higher level skills strategy gets embedded in the SFA.
- Focus more on need rather than age.
- Need to be recognition an understanding of the blurred distinction between FE and HE, the need for progression routes and taking employer's views on this.
- Appreciate and involve the value of small providers.

2.2.3 What ideas and solutions?

QUESTION: What ideas and solutions do you have for the challenges raised in session 1 (national, regional, local)?

- Task and finish groups.
- Continue to recognise the role of the voluntary sector particularly the structures developed in the past 2 yrs and the facilitative roles of lead orgs.
- Employer's voice and engagement.
- Recognise value of non accredited courses in engaging disadvantaged learners.
- Recognise the broader range of skills and knowledge that can help people to develop and benefit employers too, not just formal qualifications and work based learning.
- Single contact for all stakeholders in SFA.
- SSC and chambers role with employer engagement.
- Self-organised networks - how inclusive will they be? Should we bring in others who could contribute to their work? Who determines membership?
- Review EESCP.
- Address the massive diversity in the E of E and should be linked to discretionary funding. This diversity may be ignored if looking at overall averages.
- Compact compliance?
- Motivate participation by employers in various partnerships.
- Local authority leadership across the skills agenda.
- Local facilitated networks for the third sector to provide a voice, and increase capacity.
- Some discretionary/transition funding to fill in the gaps and disadvantaged pockets during the changes for agencies.
- Strategic lead body for ESOL provision in the region.
- Capacity building champion for the Voluntary and Community sector.
- There are gaps in the process - schools will be disconnected as they become more autonomous - will they all embrace the new diplomas, will kids get the right career advice for them and not for the benefit of the schools own objectives, league table etc.
- Need to ensure clarity between DWP provision and SFA.
- Having the SFA and Jobcentre working with community programmes.
- Communications - stop using jargon; continue to keep a flow between the transition processes for post LSC.
- What about the people leaving school, college, university this summer - there will be a huge number of young people without a job - a crisis situation whilst the LSC re-organisation is a distraction.
- Some mechanism for cross regional working for border local authorities.