

Through Inclusion to Excellence: Sector Voices

A report on
the formal consultation
processes undertaken during
2004 to 2005

Commissioned by the Steering Group for the
Strategic Review of the LSC's Planning and
Funding of Provision for Learners with Learning
Difficulties and/or Disabilities across the Post-
16 Learning and Skills Sector

July 2007

Of interest to the further education system,
researchers and academics

The Steering Group for the Strategic Review of the Learning and Skills Council's (LSC's) Planning and Funding of Provision for Learners with Learning Difficulties and/or Disabilities across the Post-16 Learning and Skills Sector asked the LSC and other agencies to facilitate a series of formal consultations with the sector regarding the issues affecting provision for learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. This report provides an overview of the findings.

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Contents

Page number

Introduction	1
Skill Conference: Review and Reshape	3
Link courses and learner pathways	3
Partnership working	3
Transition	4
Inclusion and 'other provision'	4
Progression and targets	4
Workforce development	4
Work-based learning	5
Additional Learning Support and capital funding	5
Transport	5
Housing, local provision of accommodation and the role of specialist colleges	5
Welfare benefits and family expectations of provision	6
Teaching and learning	6
Improving Quality, Improving Practice: Implementing the Disability Discrimination Act	7
Practices for developing provision	7
Barriers and gaps	8
Solutions and plans to share and spread good practice	9
Responses to the Interim Report	12
Practices for developing provision	12
Barriers and gaps	12
Solutions and plans to share and spread good practice	13
Conclusion	15

Introduction

- 1 This report provides an overview of the findings from the formal consultations with the sector regarding the issues affecting provision for learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. These findings included consideration of the barriers that faced this group entering, accessing and leaving learning. The research informed the strategic thinking and recommendations made in *Through Inclusion to Excellence*, the report of the Steering Group for the Strategic Review of the Learning and Skills Council's (LSC's) Planning and Funding of Provision for Learners with Learning Difficulties and/or Disabilities across the Post-16 Learning and Skills Sector (the Steering Group).
- 2 As outlined in *Through Inclusion to Excellence*, the review was undertaken in a two-stage process. Stage 1 (July to December 2004) acted as a research phase to identify the key issues affecting the sector. Stage 2 (January 2005 to June 2006) was an opportunity for a number of specially focused sub-groups to examine in more detail the key themes identified during stage 1 and to inform the final report. This work was complemented by extensive literature reviews, which have also been published.
- 3 Stage 1 focused on the establishment of a baseline of information and evidence for the work of the Steering Group. The Steering Group knew it was important to ensure that qualitative evidence on the issues affecting learners and the sector alike was gathered. To complete this task, information was gathered through the use of three key questions:
 - What practices should be kept and built upon in developing provision for learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities?
 - What barriers and gaps are currently present in provision for learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities?
 - What solutions and plans are required to address these problems or to implement successful practice more widely?
- 4 Using these three key questions, evidence was collected, formally and informally, from sector and individual contributions, provider networks and dialogue between Steering Group members and the wider sector. In addition, between autumn 2004 and winter 2005, the Steering Group utilised a national conference and a series of regional Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) events for consultation purposes. On each occasion, the three key questions were discussed and the findings were fed into the Steering Group. Emerging themes, findings and issues were highlighted in the interim report from the Steering Group to the National Council of the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) in January 2005.
- 5 The Steering Group sought further qualitative information from the sector to inform stage 2. This involved a targeted consultation. The consultation again used the three key questions, but on this occasion sought responses specifically in the context of the headline themes raised in the interim report and examined by the sub-groups: LSC Operations, Quality, Funding, Working with Partners: Local Collaboration and Learner Transition.
- 6 The information and evidence collected were extensive. The findings from the formal regional events, national conference and targeted consultation are presented in this publication.
- 7 The report is split into three sections. The first provides an overview of the results of the consultation with delegates at the Skill Conference: Review and Reshape held on 3 November 2004, London. The information based here is based on a report supplied to the Steering Group written by Barbara Waters and Liz Maudslay of Skill: National Bureau for Students with Disabilities (Skill).
- 8 The second section provides an overview of the results of the consultation with delegates at the nine regional events under the heading of Improving Quality, Improving Practice: Implementing the *Disability Discrimination Act*, held during autumn and winter 2005. The information is based on a report supplied to the Steering Group written by Sally Faraday and Gillian O'Toole of the Learning and Skills Development

Agency (LSDA, now the Learning and Skills Network, or LSN).

- 9 The final section of this report is an overview of the findings of a targeted consultation focused on the sector's response to the Steering Group's interim report.

Skill Conference: Review and Reshape

10 The conference was attended by 120 delegates drawn from a range of backgrounds, although primarily based in further education (FE). Seven workshops were held lasting around one and a half hours and each workshop had two facilitators drawn from Skill staff, LSC National Office and LSC regional Additional Learning Support (ALS) champions. The groups were asked to respond to the three key questions, though delegates were able to comment more widely. The responses to each of these questions were reviewed and grouped thematically, and are outlined below as bullet points.

Link courses and learner pathways

- Formal arrangements for link courses between school and FE were still necessary. They were regarded as vital as part of the provision of appropriate, timely and accessible experience of the range of post-16 opportunities available in order for young people to make an informed choice.
- Delegates welcomed the choice and variety of provision and felt this was essential if personalised learning was to be a reality.
- Individualised learning packages and flexible approaches were key to successful learning for this group of learners, as was the recognition of achievement, however small the steps.

Partnership working

- The roll-out of children's trusts might help eventually to improve co-ordinated thinking about transport, health care and shared LSC and social services provision.
- More accurate, early information on learners likely to come to college and also to need social services input would be helpful. Sources of data could be shared and data collection improved.

- Working together with Connexions on the Section 140 assessments would help to establish partnerships. Increased inter-agency work could also be useful in marketing post-16 learning routes and choices.
- The work of Connexions services on 19–25 year olds should be more prominent and the sharing of existing information improved.
- All key advisors should know about benefits arrangements such as trial periods at work with a benefit safeguard.
- In some areas, local learning partnerships were flourishing and were found to play an important role in creating horizontal information-sharing and networks and mutual support for staff working with young people in transition. Examples provided by the delegates included:
 - a South London learning partnership website
 - a Hampshire–Isle of Wight partnership between the local LSC, school and college on provision for learners with autistic spectrum disorders; the short-term nature of the funding and the varied sources of funding all with their own rules and monitoring requirements caused pressure in these cases
 - Coventry and Warwickshire Connexions transition tracking system and working partnership with social services, which involves young people in its planning and development; this is running along the lines of a children's trust and the LSC will need to develop models for its involvement in children's trusts once the Children Bill is passed
 - specialist colleges and work-based learning partnerships where learners go on placements for two months.

Transition

- Transition planning was essential and the need to start early, for example, when the learner reaches the age of 13, were highlighted.
- There was a general consensus that transition planning may not be perfect at present but that support should be given to continue to improve the process and that the LSC should use its influence on schools to improve co-operation with FE bodies.
- Delegates reported that Connexions services in some areas had insufficient resources to complete the Section 140 assessments. The approach to these assessments was decided locally and in discussion it was found that providers are not always clear about the process their local Connexions service was using and that the person-centred plan approach may appear over-simplified, but that providers could ask for the background information from Connexions on an individual learner.

Inclusion and 'other provision'

- Understanding the social model of disability was important and underpinned the concepts of person-centred planning and inclusive learning. Flexible personalised programmes were regarded as providing better learning outcomes and improved transition and progression to continued learning.
- Mobility and travel training were important parts of development of the independent learner and should be retained in the learning programme.
- There were concerns that discrete provision for learners of all ages with learning difficulties and/or disabilities that was classed as 'other provision' would be lost because of the emphasis on acquiring specific skills. Delegates were extremely concerned that they were not being kept informed about what would stay in their colleges' three-year development plans.
- Further clarity was required on the LSC approach to non-accredited learning; although there was guidance, the opportunity for varied interpretation was too great.
- Strategic area reviews needed to recognise that flexibility and small numbers of learners should feature in the mix of provision.

Progression and targets

- Delegates identified that there was a lack of clear progression into work for learners; routes were fragmented and often supported through short-term funding.
- Target-driven programmes didn't recognise the achievements of all learners and didn't recognise lateral progression or the need for some learners to maintain their learning in different contexts. The LSC needed to recognise the importance of skills maintenance and learning for pleasure.
- The emphasis on targets for Level 1 and 2 and accreditation in general sent the message that other work with learners was of little value and that other achievements were not valued. It was then easy for managers to justify cutting opportunities.
- Some delegates commented that certain achievements under Skills for Life didn't count towards the LSC targets.
- Senior managers in colleges don't see the equality and diversity strategy as an important driver.
- Some students are still pushed onto courses that don't match their needs because the college needs to meet its targets.

Workforce development

- There was a significant shortage of experienced staff, particularly communication staff for deaf learners.
- Staff need to be able to communicate at the same level as the learner; a signer with Level 1 skills would not be able to support a deaf learner doing A-levels, for example.
- There were also significant differences in pay levels for different support staff and this led to high labour turnover, which was unhelpful for the learner and the provider. Support staff who take notes for learners also needed a spread of experience so that they could adapt quickly to a new course.
- Staff budgets for these support staff were seen as limited, as was money to support in-house training for support staff.

- Support workers had no career path and therefore little incentive to gain skills and experience; it has remained a low-status, low-paid job. Both staff and learners deserve better. It was noted that mapping out careers in education support with a view to establishing a professional progression route would encourage people to stay in post.
- There was a lack of professional qualifications for teaching staff and tutors, so there is a real sector skills development issue here.

Work-based learning

- Work-based learning (WBL) needed to be better understood at school level and seen to have the same status and value as FE. Information about WBL should form part of careers and pathway guidance for young people.
- Many young people were motivated by the change to work and this is often seen as a more 'grown-up' pathway.

Additional Learning Support and capital funding

- ALS had been a great success and should be protected and promoted.
- ALS wasn't available in adult and community learning (ACL) provision and the LSC needed to be clearer in its plans for this. This made issues regarding support staff challenging. The future of support in WBL was unclear and this lack of consistency led to a reluctance to expand provision.
- Many delegates raised concerns about the ALS budget. Some did not understand how the budget could be used now and did not know what was in their three-year development plans for this group of learners. Many delegates had been bypassed when their plans were drawn up and were struggling to find out information internally.
- There was a need to invest more capital in adapting buildings and enabling sites to work together to provide learning facilities. Design needed to be improved to meet the requirements of learners, for example, turning space for wheelchair users.

- Some providers lacked specialist equipment and there was no provision for sharing equipment or expertise.

Transport

- Transport problems persisted; local authorities are inconsistent in what they will provide for learners up to 19 years old, up to 21 years old and up to 25 years old. Local LSCs had tried to pull this together but transport remains a real barrier to participation. There is strong evidence in local LSCs and Connexions of the inequalities of transport provision.
- Colleges had to deal with students coming from different local authorities and receiving different or no provision. Colleges felt they were expected to fill these gaps.

Housing, local provision of accommodation and the role of specialist colleges

- One area that received insufficient attention was the provision of housing for young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Closer working with social services and health care services would provide a clear picture of where a young person was going to live over, say, the next five years.
- The LSC could look into how local housing options might be linked to education programmes to see what the opportunities and barriers were.
- This led to discussion of the difficulty of the 'silos approach' where even within the LSC there was sometimes a lack of flexibility.
- The specialist sector colleges were willing to be part of this development but needed support to enter local partnerships and change their pattern of recruitment. This would enable specialist colleges to continue for those that needed them most.

Welfare benefits and family expectations of provision

- Delegates also reported concerns from young people and parents over the inter-relationship between different welfare benefits and the impact of moving on to college, WBL and work.
- The use of and entitlement to direct payments wasn't well understood by learners, families or advisors, and the lack of co-ordination with social services contributed to this. There was insufficient understanding of direct payments and learners were reluctant to commit themselves.
- Parents also expressed surprise that a full-time college course was not 9:00 to 17:00, Monday to Friday with transport arranged, as had been the case at school. There was a need for a lot more interaction with Connexions and youth services on how young people might fill their time constructively, and on the level of independence at home and in using transport a young person might achieve. Many parents worked full time and would not accept an FE college place where the young person would be stranded at college without transport for long periods of time, or would be left at home unsupervised. This was often a reason for seeking a residential placement.

Teaching and learning

- Some delegates felt that the approach had become too mechanistic; stakeholders were too hung up on funding instead of looking at learning and teaching.
- Leadership on teaching and learning and good practice was essential if colleges were not to concentrate on administration and meeting LSC targets to the detriment of meeting the learners' needs. A national teaching and learning initiative would put this back on the agenda.
- The LSC will have staff engaged in this programme who could work with the champions and the Association of Colleges and the National Association of Specialist Colleges to raise the profile of good teaching and learning.
- Inspection reports could also be used constructively.

Improving Quality, Improving Practice: Implementing the Disability Discrimination Act

11 This section of the report outlines the issues raised at a series of regional events held in the autumn term 2004. These events were organised by the Learning and Skills Development Agency (LSDA; now the Learning and Skills Network, or LSN), in partnership with the National Institute of Adult Continuing Education (NIACE) and Skill, to provide further support in implementing the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) in the post-16 education and training sector. The events were aimed at those with management responsibility for implementing the DDA and came from a wide range of ACL, WBL and FE organisations. The delegates were asked to comment on the three key questions:

- What practices should be kept and built upon in developing provision for learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities?
- What barriers and gaps are currently present in provision for learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities?
- What solutions and plans are required to address these problems or to more widely implement successful practice?

12 At each event, a member of the LSC's strategic review team provided input on the review and led a discussion of issues. Delegates were also invited to leave written responses to the three consultation questions. The information in this report is based on 86 responses. The issues raised are presented under the headings of the three consultation questions. The feedback given by delegates in the different regions has been combined unless the issue is one that is specific to a particular region, in which case the region is identified. The feedback from discussion at the events is also incorporated alongside the delegates' written responses. The data

is analysed and grouped under headings that have been identified as key issues.

13 This part is in two sections. The first section provides a summary of the headline messages from each question in order of frequency of reference. The second section lists some key comments of interest.

Practices for developing provision

Funding

14 The issue of funding was the most pressing with the delegates from all the regions. The overwhelming message, which emerged from all sectors, was the need for funding to continue to be based on individual learners' needs; having the learner at the centre of the process. In addition, respondents wanted funding for ALS to continue, with a call from ACL and WBL providers for better and simpler access to this funding.

Provision

15 Several issues are grouped under the broad heading of provision. The keyword to emerge was that of flexibility – flexibility of programme design, delivery and accreditation. Delegates wanted to maintain and build on flexible provision based on individual learners' needs, continuation of specialist provision and support, accessibility of courses for all levels and the continuation of courses at Pre-entry Level.

Staff development and training

- 16 The main messages that emerged here were the need for the continuation of staff training, and research and development. There were numerous responses from delegates on the value of networking and they also spoke positively about wanting to participate in future research and development activity and share good practice.

Inclusive practice

- 17 There were several responses about the need for implementing inclusive learning policies. Initiatives and training in awareness and including learners were practices that delegates were keen to keep and build on, along with the need to review practice to ensure this continues to improve. However, as with other issues, funding was mentioned as key to the development of such policies.

Other

- 18 Other practices identified as important to keep and build on included:
- continued learner involvement
 - the importance of good, clear information-sharing
 - the positives of effective inter-agency working
 - support for learners
 - the use of and need for different resources and relationships with workplace employers.

Barriers and gaps

- 19 This question received far more responses than either of the other two, which is clearly significant. As with question 1, funding, provision and issues relating to staff training and capacity were at the fore. However, also to emerge and receive a large number of responses were issues relating to WBL and information-sharing. Although there were concerns about these in the responses to the other two questions, significantly more issues were raised here.

Funding

- 20 The most significant barrier or gap identified was funding and the inequalities in funding streams between different sectors, that is, FE, ACL and WBL, and inconsistencies in funding. The limitation of lack of funding for support and the issue of eligibility for funding of some programmes, such as non-accredited programmes and 'other provision', were also noted. Some of the comments suggest that providers have not understood some of the recent changes to ALS. Difficulties with the provision of transport, equipment and inflexibility of the funding system were also mentioned as barriers. Comments specific to the WBL sector include the need for funding for basic skills provision and for adequate funding for the WBL sector as a whole.

Provision

- 21 Gaps identified in provision included the lack of, and difficulties with, progression routes, the non-availability of a full range of courses, particularly in the area of non-accredited learning, and the lack of appropriate provision for learners with complex needs and learners with mental health difficulties. Inflexibility and lack of choice were also noted, as was the need to reduce class sizes for provision for learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. There were significant issues specific to the WBL sector. These included lack of a flexible framework and the need to better engage learners, and educate employers and referral agencies.

Staff capacity and training

- 22 There was a significant number of responses about gaps and barriers in capacity and training for staff, which ties in to the small number of responses to the first question relating to training. The topics raised included the need for awareness training for a whole range of disabilities and learning difficulties, a shortage of trained staff, the identification of a lack of skills in some staff, and the need for specialist qualifications. A number commented on insufficient funding for training, along with a lack of time, and the need for some kind of support and advice line for all sectors including employers. Also mentioned was the shortage of specialist advice and support and the need for signposting towards sources of help and support.

Employers and work-based learning

- 23 There was a large number of responses relating to WBL. One of the biggest problems to emerge was how to meet the needs of learners who have difficulties with literacy and numeracy; providers often lack the expertise and resources to provide appropriate tuition. The lack of parity with other sectors for additional support entitlement and the attitude of employers towards the employment of learners with disabilities and/or learning difficulties were also seen as barriers. Dyslexia is seen as a barrier for some learners as it inhibits them from being able to obtain full Apprenticeship frameworks.

Information-sharing

- 24 The responses about barriers and gaps in sharing information focused on issues of disclosure and transition. These included a lack of information and poor organisation of information about learners, especially in transition and particularly from mainstream education. Another identified gap was the need for a system to track learners between providers.

Other

- 25 Other issues that were raised as barriers and gaps included a lack of resources and specialist support and advice, and insufficient support for learners with mental health problems. The provision of transport, particularly in rural areas, and issues relating to access to premises were two further issues of concern.

Solution and plans to share and spread good practice

Funding

- 26 Funding was again the number one concern. Whilst there were, perhaps predictably, demands for additional funding, there were also calls for greater flexibility of funding and the need for it to be more specifically targeted. Other issues raised included simplifying the funding process, making it more accessible and funding to support learners in the workplace.

- 27 Suggested solutions for WBL include funding the individual learner in the form of a wage, funding components of Apprenticeship frameworks rather than full frameworks, and making extra funding available for learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities in the workplace as part of college or WBL programmes.

Provision

- 28 Respondents described a need for a holistic approach to tailor provision to the needs of individual learners and to devise different ways of recognising achievement and success and non-accredited learning. Respondents also identified a need for a review of regional provision, greater flexibility and the development of local provision for courses to meet local needs, along with local, specialised delivery and training. Respondents from the WBL sector asked for support to improve its delivery of literacy and numeracy skills as its members lack the capacity to do so.

Staff training

- 29 Staff require training to meet the needs of learners with a range of learning difficulties and/or disabilities, including learners with mental health difficulties. Staff training at all levels, guidelines on issues such as disclosure and sharing of information, social care responsibilities, and the use of appropriate language were also topics raised. One solution is the provision of access to specialist advice and support. The WBL sector suggested in-service training to meet the needs of employers and employees, as well as trainer and assessor development for key skills provision.

Resources

- 30 Some solutions suggested to address the lack of resources included regional help systems, a national advisory service, a database and helplines for support and guidance, and publication of relevant learning materials and learning packs. Transport was also raised as a key issue; one solution suggested was the setting up of community transport projects.

Other

- 31 Other issues referred to included improvements and developments in inter-agency working, particularly forging better links with agencies, different ways of addressing problems relating to information-sharing, and providing support for learners with little or poor home support.

- 32 Of the three most frequently recurring issues, funding, staff capacity and training, and factors relating to provision, funding was shown to be the single most important issue. Parity of funding for the WBL and ACL sector with the FE sector, maintaining the provision of ALS funding, and the need to ensure that funding matches the individual learner's needs were the over-riding issues raised. The importance of keeping and building on inclusive practice was stressed, as were effective inter-agency working and effective support and learner involvement.
- 33 There remain barriers and gaps in relation to information-sharing, specifically lack of information and poor transfer arrangements especially throughout transitions. There was a significant difference in responses by sector. The large number of WBL responses to question 2 indicated that there are significant gaps and barriers that need addressing for this sector.
- 34 Many comments were recorded as part of the events. Some of these points are listed below.
- There is a lack of parity of support across the funding streams.
 - There needs to be more flexibility with funding, and the possible reform of funding streams into one system.
 - There needs to be an investigation into the improvement of funding for transition arrangements for learners with complex difficulties, before they start courses. This should also recognise the need for transient enablers.
 - ALS funding should not be based on historical data but on current.
 - Programmes require a critical mass. Lower numbers of learners can create problems in recruiting and retaining specialist staff.
 - There is a need for further curriculum development and flexible modular provision.
 - The development of person-centred planning approaches to learning should be continued.
 - Learner input in establishing support and learning plans is essential; planning must begin with the end in mind. This will support movement towards autonomy and self-advocacy.
 - Providers and awarding bodies need be better at recognising achievement through alternative means, for example paperless portfolios for National Vocational Qualifications.
 - It is essential to ensure that changes lead to real progression and are sustainable.
 - Provision needs to have purpose. People with learning difficulties and/or disabilities should not be retained in learning simply in order to occupy them.
 - There needs to be an expansion in provision for learners with profound, complex and multiple disabilities.
 - There is a shortage of trained specialists.
 - Continuing professional development is essential, as is the opportunity to share experiences.
 - Inclusive training and awareness for learners and staff in mainstream FE is needed. There must be a whole-organisation approach. This will prevent over-reliance on learner support teams.
 - The training needs of those who work with learners in other categories need consideration, as do staff resources in general.
 - There should be a mapping exercise of qualifications to skills.
 - Staff need formal training and qualifications and should have the opportunity for specialisation.
 - There is often a difference between the needs of the young person and the wishes of carers.
 - A more co-ordinated and cohesive way of working is required. Collaborating with social care and health is essential.
 - Links between agencies need to be better.
 - Appropriate legislation may facilitate better partnership working.
 - A holistic approach to services is required – a clear working relationship between education, health and social services.
 - Improved referral processes from Connexions for disabled learners or those with learning difficulties are required.
 - There needs to be access to previous disclosures and information that relates to learners' physical, visual, health and educational needs.

- Data needs to be shared to prevent duplicated and needless assessment.
- Transition arrangements are poorly organised and information does not go with the learner in all cases.
- Information from feeder organisations, including information on previous advice and support, is often not available.
- Early information on numbers of learners coming into post-16 education each year and their requirements for learning effectively is essential.
- Learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are often treated or considered as all the same. This leads to stigmatisation and to non-disclosure and learners not accessing appropriate assistance.
- There can often be low expectations by others of what learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities can achieve.

Responses to the Interim Report

- 35 Using the data collected and analysis performed as part of stage 1 of the strategic review process, the Steering Group provided an interim report to the LSC National Council outlining the initial findings and direction of travel. The LSC National Council endorsed both the review and the direction of travel.
- 36 In a spirit of transparency, the Steering Group requested that the interim report be published and that a targeted consultation be performed to collect any further qualitative data to inform the specially focused sub-groups and the final subsequent report.
- 37 The targeted consultation lasted 3 weeks and received 27 responses. It sought information on the five emerging themes of the interim report against the three questions. The issues and points raised mirror those raised at the Skill Conference and regional DDA events. A summary of the key responses is listed below.

Practices for developing provision

- Where learner-centred planning is in place, it is effective.
- ALS methodology has enabled colleges to meet the needs of learners.
- Where there is clarity with regard to transport responsibilities, learner travel and access are good.
- Raising aspirations has been possible because the LSC has provided funds in a more sophisticated manner than its predecessors.
- The DDA has widened learner access to FE colleges.
- Multi-agency approaches should be maintained as this also facilitates a continuum of provision by ensuring a holistic approach to future placement. The specialist disciplines can in this way support learners, families, carers and other professionals who may contribute to the process.

- Good relations between providers have been built.

Barriers and gaps

- There remain gaps in language, focus and culture between the LSC and other agencies.
- Data on performance and participation needs to include qualitative information.
- There is a qualification gap at Entry Level and Pre-entry Level in some subject areas.
- Health and social care providers often have the strongest knowledge of individuals. However, they may not understand how they can help them with their learning.
- Funding mechanisms can be complicated.
- Many of the learners have significant learning difficulties and as a consequence their performance will not contribute towards national targets. This needs to be recognised.
- Pay is a major barrier to recruiting qualified staff and retaining them.
- There are also problems in recruiting staff (both teachers and support staff) that have the correct qualifications.
- Local LSCs need to be better linked to learning disability partnership boards.
- There is often a lack of consistency between agencies and learning providers working together.
- Where people are unlikely to be able to progress to employment or further learning, there are limited links for the learner to enter care provision.
- Funding of supported employment agencies is challenging.

- There is difficulty in progressing some people with learning difficulties and disabilities into employment. They can become economically excluded, even though they may have the capacity to work in either supported or non-supported employment.

Solutions and plans to share and spread good practice

- Changes are required to other related policies designed at least to include or, at best, to advantage learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities; for example Skills for Life targets currently distort provision away from lower levels.
- The LSC at a local level is unaware of many organisations that provide services for learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities that are not funded by the LSC. This means that when consultations, mapping exercises and area reviews and so on are initiated, organisations are not invited to contribute, some joining the process late or not at all. This also happens for organisations that are franchises or partners of colleges, and therefore not direct providers.
- Future developments should remain learner centred and this focus will ensure the most appropriate type of provision for learners and will ensure an appropriate assessment of needs has been undertaken.
- It is necessary to recognise that organisations providing services for other agencies such as Jobcentre Plus, the NHS and local authorities will have been through a similar process to that required to become an LSC-funded provider. These organisations would benefit from a simpler, less bureaucratic route to direct funding.
- More descriptive ways of asking about disability on entry to learning would be helpful – many still ask 'Are you registered disabled?' which is no longer appropriate. The question 'Do you consider yourself to have a disability?' may encourage better levels of self-declaration. People often do not disclose a disability unless it is directly related to the learning process; this could disadvantage those with mobility and access issues.
- There is a need to provide some funds to generate innovative approaches. It needs to be recognised that partnership between agencies can be complex and extends well beyond education to social services and health. It is not simply a matter of education partners coming together.
- The LSC should be mindful of older learners.
- LSC funds should be used appropriately, thus avoiding displacement or duplication of day care provision.
- The existing complex bureaucracy between agencies will not be easy to disentangle. However, any reduction in existing levels of bureaucracy related to funding and the time-consuming audit process will be welcomed.
- A more flexible approach within institutions to part-fund their learners to attend other learning institutions should be encouraged. Some colleges do manage to collaborate and 'share' learners, but this good practice needs to be encouraged and facilitated more. This is especially important at the points of transition where time may be needed for learners to learn how to get to and from a new place and to find their way around and learn the systems before more formal learning can begin.
- Greater clarity about different delivery roles between agencies and providers is required and it needs to be spelt out in formal guidance.
- Regional centres of excellence are required, designed to profile successful provision, support other providers and involve employers.
- The various services involved, including employment services, need to think and plan together. There should be more provision of sheltered employment opportunities.
- Many of the learners will not make much educational progress in the accepted sense of the term, as they have degenerative illnesses – Alzheimer's or other forms of dementia. The emphasis with them should be on maintaining skills to support some quality of life and to postpone the need for long-term institutional care for as long as possible. This should be jointly funded with health agencies.
- There needs to be stronger working between Jobcentre Plus and the LSC to plan growth in the availability of, and access to, supported employment.
- Clear local agreements and guidance are needed to help ensure greater clarity over roles in the context of transport.

- Planning must involve all the agencies, and sharing information and common consistent definitions are essential.
- There needs to be clarity during transition between children's services and adult services of health and social care.
- Improvements are required to the professional development infrastructure to ensure that properly trained and competent staff are in place to raise quality and develop service capacity.
- Shared use of equipment will provide cost efficiencies.
- Continued and increased emphasis on learner-centred funding and planning arrangements is needed.

Conclusion

- 38 Each of the different formal consultation processes clearly identified recurring thematic issues that were evident across all the elements of the sector. These responses, along with informal feedback received, were vital and useful in informing the thinking and recommendations of the Steering Group.

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