

Report of the Chair of the Equality and Diversity Committee

Date of issue	15 January 2007
Audience	National Council
LSC office	National Office
Publication intent	Internal
Agenda item	11
Paper	LSC 06/2007

Background and introduction

- 1 This paper forms the annual update to the LSC's National Council on the core work of the National Equality and Diversity Committee and its subgroups.

Recommendation

- 2 Members of National Council are invited to:
 - Note the information contained within this report
 - Comment on particular items as appropriate
 - Indicate specific topics that should be covered in future reports
 - Use this report as a basis for influencing priorities across the LSC and in decision making.

Equality and Diversity Strategy

- 3 The LSC currently has in place a National Equality and Diversity Strategy 2004/07; this strategy sets out six core priority areas for the LSC to focus on, in discharging its responsibilities regarding equality and diversity. These are:
 - **Leadership;**
 - **Reaching learners, including those who are disengaged;**
 - **Supporting compliance;**
 - **(Inclusive)/Personalised learning – a commitment to treating learners as individuals;**
 - **Working with employers;**
 - **Measuring outcomes.**

- 4 It is not clear however that each of these strands are being implemented in a consistent way nationally, nor is it clear to all of our staff, partners, stakeholders and providers the exact outcomes that are expected in implementing this strategy.
- 5 The Equality and Diversity Committee is overseeing the review of this strategy and the development of a Single Equality Scheme for the Council that covers each of the areas of legislation that we must comply with. This will also provide a simple, more coherent framework within which to operate, ensuring national consistency and also enabling flexibility for colleagues working regionally and locally to implement as appropriate.
- 6 Our intention is for the SES to be a high level, strategic document which is clearly linked to the key priorities and corporate processes of the Council in order to embed equality and diversity in our ways of working. It seeks to exploit the common ground in the statutory requirements for individual schemes and - where possible - extend this to the areas of religion or belief, sexual orientation and age – for example, it is intended that when impact assessment or workforce monitoring is performed, all six areas would be addressed, subject to the availability of a suitable evidence base.
- 7 National Council will wish to note that the LSC's practice is being viewed by key stakeholders in the Equalities field as being exemplary in this area of work and development.
- 8 The reorganisation of the National Equality and Diversity Strategy provides an opportunity to clearly articulate the way in which our equality and diversity responsibilities will be delivered. This revised approach will also demonstrate the way in which the equality and diversity policy area supports the delivery of the Annual Statement of Priorities.

Subgroups of the Equality and Diversity Committee

- 9 The Equality and Diversity Committee has established a number of subgroups that have had the responsibility of leading specific elements of work on the Committee's behalf. The subgroups include:
 - Learners with Learning Difficulties and/or Disabilities;
 - Mental Health Task Group;
 - Equality and Diversity Impact Measures;
 - Muslim Communities;
 - Age Equality;
 - Voluntary and Community Sector; 'Working Together Strategy Group'
- 10 All of the subgroups report to the Equality and Diversity Committee at each meeting. Council will wish to take particular note of the following section which outlines the progress that has been made over the last 12 months.

Key Outcomes

11 Learners with Learning Difficulties and / or Disabilities

The Subgroup for Learners with Learning Difficulties and/or Disabilities has played a leading role in the development of the LSC's strategy in response to *Through Inclusion to Excellence*. The LSC published *Learning for Living and Work* in October 2006 and this strategy provides the vision for the way in which we will develop and manage provision for learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. The subgroup will continue to oversee the implementation of this strategy, as well as the implementation through the executive working regionally. An additional key outcome for this subgroup will be the appointment of the National Panel of Disabled Learners which will advise both the National Council and the LSC's executive on the way in which policy impacts upon disabled learners.

- 12 This development links with the duty placed upon the LSC to involve disabled people in policy development, implementation and evaluation. This is a requirement of the disability equality duty. The Equality and Diversity Committee should like to draw attention to the LSC's Disability Equality Scheme which has received much praise from the Disability Rights Commission and was proactively championed across the FE System by the Chair of National Council, in his role as Disability Equality Duty Champion.

13 Mental Health

The Mental Health Task Group has delivered the first ever strategy for people with Mental Health issues in the further education system. A strengthened focus on learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities by colleagues working regionally has enabled the development of regional mental health partnerships with the remit to improve learning outcomes for people with Mental Health issues.

14 EDIMS

Equality and Diversity Impact Measures (EDIMs) have been streamlined and the policy rearticulated across the LSC. The LSC has reduced the number of EDIMs that exist, refocusing on deliverables in the context of the LSC's published priorities. EDIMs are also being developed nationally and the Committee is seeking to ensure that these form part of the priorities the LSC publishes. The Committee is also advising the executive on the ways in which these measures could form a part of the *Framework for Excellence*.

15 Muslim Communities

In the wake of terrorist events in July 2006, the DfES and LSC agreed that it would be beneficial to consider in more detail the role the FE System plays in supporting the development and integration into society of marginalised groups. The Committee has commissioned research led by SHM to explore the role education plays in life of young Muslims (up to age 25). The

Committee will consider the outcomes of these findings and recommend a course of action to the executive.

16 Age

In October 2006 new legislation was announced providing protection to people in the workplace and in vocational education and training, from discrimination based upon their age. The LSC has developed guidance for its delivery partners on the age regulations and regional managers for equality and diversity continue to support implementation regionally. Members of this group would particularly commend the LSC for the impact Train to Gain has had in increasing learning opportunities for older people; particularly, those aged between 35 and 55 years.

17 Voluntary and community sector

The LSC published "Working Together", a strategy designed to create better relationships for learning and skills delivery by the Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) organisations, in 2004. Since then, significant policy shifts for learning and skills have moved the LSC away from engagement with the VCS in the delivery of LSC targets, whilst simultaneously, equally significant policy moves within government are promoting a greater role for the third sector (made up of the VCS, social enterprises, and charities) particularly in the provision of public services.

18 In October 2006, the LSC convened an Advisory Group to the LSC Equality and Diversity Group on VCS issues. Chris Banks has addressed the group, and requested some radical thinking behind its recommendations to National Council, including how the LSC might address these policy tensions and develop its work with the sector in key areas.

19 The VCS Advisory Group has received three documents addressing different aspects of LSC engagement with the sector, and have drawn the following conclusions from each:

- I. An evaluation of LSC engagement with the sector at local level shows that engagement is inconsistent but that there have been many examples of good practice and sound relationships. Recent staffing changes arising from the *agenda for change* have meant there has been some challenges for the LSC in local contact and communication with the sector, suggesting that some relationships may need refreshing and rebuilding. Attention must be given to developing LSC staff with the knowledge and skills needed to engage with the sector effectively. (See executive summary attached - Appendix One)
- II. The contribution of the voluntary and community sector to LSC targets and priorities has been analysed using data from the ILR, with over 50 million ILR records interrogated for this purpose. This analysis indicates that there has been a significant reduction in work delivered through the sector. It also shows that where such provision still occurs, there are areas of notable success in engaging with learners who are furthest away from the job market and the mainstream learner environment. (See Executive summary attached - Appendix Two)

- III. The contribution of the sector has also been set against “Raising our game”, the LSC Annual Statement of Priorities. This demonstrates the significant potential across the range of third sector providers to deliver against LSC priorities, building on existing experience and capability – often developed without LSC support.

The recommendations that the Advisory Group would make to Council are as follows

A). That the Working Together strategy needs to be refreshed in the light of changes to policy as a result of the FE Reform White Paper and the Leitch report, with an emphasis on how the LSC can maximise the role of the sector in engaging and supporting vulnerable and detached learners. This is in recognition of the LSC commitment in the annual statement of priorities to “*intervene directly to secure provision...for those least able to articulate them, to protect vulnerable learners and ensure equality of opportunity*” (Raising the Game, page 12).

The strategy should also consider the work force development needs of the sector particularly in relation to public service delivery. This is in recognition of: the Government’s commitment to increasing third sector involvement in public service delivery; the knowledge that the sector is now a substantial employer (accounting for 2.2% of the national paid workforce) and given the commitment in the annual statement of priorities that “*the public sector remains a priority for us. We will: continue to improve its skills base so that it delivers public services more efficiently and plays an active part in up skilling the wider workforce*” (Raising the Game, Page 10).

B). That the funding policies of the LSC, in particular the procurement process and the policy on franchising, both ensure that the sector are able to act and compete on a level playing field with other providers, and that third sector providers are not placed in inequitable or dependant relations with other providers.

C). That the LSC quickly resolves the problem of data capture for the sector in order that the contribution of this work to LSC priorities can be identified more easily. This should include a better system of data capture on franchise and other partnership arrangements, as well as a more robust definition of which organisations should be included.

D). That the LSC undertake a staff development programme to ensure that those staff that need a more thorough or up to date understanding of the sector are given the necessary time and the support; and that the LSC allocates more staff to sector engagement in order to ensure that this is effective.

E). That the National Council ask that a sub group of Directors within the LSC be asked to take these recommendations forward, so that a cross LSC

approach can be agreed and that the resulting actions to be taken are reported back to the Advisory Group.

F). In the light of the concerns that the Advisory Group has about the engagement of the LSC with the sector, it is also recommended that the above work is completed by September 2007.

Closing remarks

- 20 The Equality and Diversity Committee and members of its subgroups have made significant progress across a range of areas over the past twelve months. The National Council is asked to continue to support this Committee and its subgroups in order to continue to make progress in the areas described.
- 21 Council is also asked support the development of a revised equality and diversity strategy, a Single Equality Scheme, that provides a single, coherent and contextualised framework through which the LSC will deliver its equality and diversity remit.

Paper creator	Shirley Cramer
Date created	15 January 2007
Document ref.	C:\Documents and Settings\probert\l\Desktop\nat-reportofthechairoftheequalityanddiversitycommittee-paper-15jan2007.doc