

Minutes



Leading learning and skills

Date 24 February 2006
Subject Young People's Learning Committee
Location Meeting Room 15B
Time 08:30
LSC office National Office
Publication intent Public

Present Ian Ferguson (Chairman)
Saif Ahmad
Bob Bischof
Kath Boullen
Maggie Galliers
Ian Gartshore
Christine Gaskill
Ruth Harker
David McGahey
Lynne Morris
Sue Peacock
John Rourke
Mark Sanders

In attendance Hilary Anslow
Gordon McKenzie (DfES - item 10 only)
Penny Silvester (Ofsted)
Robert Smith (Stanton Marris - item 4 only)

LSC staff Trevor Fellowes (Director of Learner Support)
Stephen Gardner
Melanie Hunt (National Director of Learning)
Jim Minogue (Director of Financial Planning and
Forecasting - item 9 only)
Sue Randall (Clerk)
John Ratcliff (Policy Group Manager, 14-19)
Debbie Watson

Apologies Apologies have been received from:
Danny Carrigan
Jon Coles (DfES)
Caroline Kempner (LSC)
Anne Weinstcok (Connexions)

Item 1. Welcome and introductions

- 1.1 The Chairman welcomed the three new members of the Committee: Kath Boullen, David McGahey and Christine Gaskill. He asked each new member to give a brief summary of their background.
- 1.2 The Chairman also welcomed Melanie Hunt in her new capacity as National Director for Learning.
- 1.3 The Committee was disappointed to note that no DfES representative had been able to attend this meeting.
- 1.4 Prior to the meeting commencing, Melanie Hunt gave a brief update on the impact of the LSC's Theme 7 under its *agenda for change*. She confirmed that National Office will not be managing programmes directly anymore (with the exception of Learner Support Programmes), but it will lead on relationships with national partners and policy development. It will also map the impact of policy on performance.

Item 2. PSA Targets

- 2.1 Melanie Hunt gave an update on the progress of the key targets for young people.
- 2.2 The Committee noted the following:
 - The need to look at activities to increase participation at 17
 - The country's position on the global success chart will not improve even if all the PSA targets are achieved, because the other countries are improving at the same rate
 - Growth in participation across the country varies across LSC regions and across sectors (FE, School Sixth Forms, Work Based Learning). There are also significant regional variations in the size of the NEET group
 - Attainment at Key Stage 3 has a massive impact on young people's pathways and participation at 16. There is a need to consider how this should affect planning for 14-19. The introduction of Specialist Diplomas may help to address issues around the complexity of vocational pathways
 - The amount of "churn" affects interventions: 80% of young people are never part of the NEET group. Most of the rest move in and out of the group
 - The roll out of Education Maintenance Allowances is having a positive impact on participation
 - Headlines about the survey Connexions undertook to establish how many young people are waiting for a place in education or training. The figure quoted is approximately 35,000. Once placed, this should have a major impact on the NEET cohort, although this figure needs to be fully understood before any solutions can be reached
 - Very positive news about early achievement of the Level 2 at 19 target; noted the possibility that there will be a new measure of Level 2 post 2008 with a requirement to include functional skills

- It is vital to fully understand the learners
- There has been some progress over the barriers identified by the PMDU review of the L2 at 19 target, and the LSC is currently working on the other areas of the review.

2.3 The Chairman thanked Melanie for the comprehensive update that set out the “big picture” of what is currently happening. He asked that the Committee take heed of the very important information contained in the update.

2.4 The Committee was asked for its comments or views on the update.

2.5 The timing of any “snapshot” of the current landscape is key. Young People traditionally do not want to wait for the start of a course in September – once their decision is made, they usually want to start straight away. Therefore, there is a danger of losing initially engaged young people.

2.6 If suitable provision is not immediately available, there can be a very real danger of creating a backlog of young people waiting to be placed.

2.7 It was suggested that a discussion on the Learning Allowance would be very useful for a future meeting.

Action: Sue Randall to discuss with the Young People’s Division which meeting this should be brought to

2.8 Lessons from other countries which do not have a NEET problem can be learned. The Committee accepted this, and it was acknowledged that all the comparative information exists but the Committee needs to be better briefed on it.

Action: Melanie Hunt to arrange for a Committee briefing

2.9 It is crucial for the LSC not to be nervous of tackling the “unknown” cohort (those young people who have dropped out of the system to such an extent that they cannot even be classed as NEET). It was acknowledged that in tackling the “unknowns”, they may be pushed into the NEET cohort, thus having the undesirable outcome of increasing the numbers of NEET. However, this should not deter the LSC from tackling the problem.

2.10 There is a danger in concentrating solely on the 35,000 young people identified in the Connexions survey as awaiting a placement. These young people will become engaged eventually, so limited resources may be better concentrated elsewhere. This was acknowledged by the executive, however, the Committee was also asked to note that the NEET cohort has never been dealt with in such a targeted manner before, so even small, incremental improvements are actually relatively big successes.

2.11 There is a real need to cost the impact of reducing the 35,000. If firm decisions and placements have not been made about these young people’s futures by September, they then become very hard to capture after that date.

2.12 It was agreed that this had been an extremely useful discussion, and updates on progress against targets should become a regular part of Committee business.

Action: Sue Randall/Melanie Hunt

Item 3. 14-19 Implementation Plan (Paper YPLC 01/2006)

- 3.1 John Ratcliff introduced this item that provided a report of progress by the LSC on elements of the 14-19 White Paper Implementation Plan. He commenced by giving a brief introduction to the plan which is a joint document produced by DfES, LSC, SSDA and QCA. It is a long term plan to 2013, with a key milestone year within it of 2008.
- 3.2 The Committee noted the key areas to be addressed: drop out rate; employee needs (skills); and university needs (the best are not stretched).
- 3.3 The Plan highlights three priorities: opportunities for individuals; everyone to master the basics; raising participation levels. A number of measures drop down from these priorities which are detailed in the Plan, but can be outlined as:
- Curriculum choice areas for young people (entitlements at 14-16 and 16-19) which will be publicised through area prospectuses
 - Setting out the responsibilities of the various partners, such as LSC, schools and the Local Authority
 - Developing qualifications, specifically, Specialist Diplomas and functional skills qualifications
 - Delivery – there will be local flexibility to deliver the entitlement in the best way for an area, this may include bringing in new providers through competitions
 - Funding – although there will be no additional funds, current funding will be redistributed to support the implementation.
- 3.4 The discussion that followed was wide ranging with a number of practical comments and steers on the content of the Plan. Members were advised that the paper provided for this item gave a summary of what was in the Plan, so many areas were covered in the Plan, but not necessarily highlighted in the presentation or paper. Bearing this in mind, key comments were as follows:
- Success depends on training the teachers who will actually be instrumental in delivering against the Plan
 - Learner entitlement presents a number of challenges and it will be interesting to note how these are overcome. The unit of planning perhaps needs to be at a lower level than Local Authority boundaries
 - The full commitment of Local Authorities does need to be assured, particularly in the light of their limited resources
 - There does need to be some creative thinking on joint investment, and the LSC needs to capture and share effective ideas
 - Many colleges will, on a purely practical basis, struggle to deliver against this plan unless funding levels are known in advance to enable effective budgeting
 - Specialist Diplomas rely on the engagement of employers. This will be challenging as it is a new area, and engaging employers fully and effectively is already very challenging

- The fact that there is no plan for employer engagement is an area of grave concern, particularly in the light of the Secretary of State's insistence on work placements for young people
- The Plan will generate a number of boundary and travel to work issues which will need careful planning to overcome. Flexibility and pragmatism will be key
- Cost and access issues are also crucial. At the moment, appropriate work placements simply do not exist in sufficient numbers. Many local LSCs cannot afford to fund transport for young people, and collaboration can be very expensive, so there are many funding issues to be thought through in detail
- There are capacity issues about leading the planning. At the moment, this does not seem to exist in either the Local Authority or the LSC. It is crucial that this issue is fed back to the DfES
- It may prove useful to look at the interaction between all the current legislation, and whether it is all sufficiently complimentary
- All members agreed that the current employer engagement/work experience programme is probably unsuitable for use with the Plan. This was felt to be the area of greatest concern
- There seems to be very few incentives built into the Plan, without which, delivery against it could prove very difficult
- There are alternatives to gaining work experience in an actual workplace, which may have to be used if the employer engagement issue is such a problem. Real choice is also essential which is predicated on high quality Information, Advice and Guidance
- The current presentation of Apprenticeships as a separate pathway is unhelpful. These need to be integrated into the Plan.

3.5 Members were thanked for their incisive comments. On funding, members were advised that the Direct Schools Grant should contain an element for 14-16 which should alleviate some pressures. It was agreed that all the other comments would be taken away and fed into the Plan through the appropriate channels.

3.6 The Chairman thanked the Committee and John Ratcliff for the useful session. It was agreed that the Plan gives a coherent standpoint against which the Committee can continue to press its position.

Item 4. Draft Partnership Principles

4.1 Robert Smith of management consultants Stanton Marris, joined the meeting to update the Committee on work to establish a set of "Partnership Principles" which aim to shape the way in which the LSC works with its partners.

4.2 The Committee noted that Stanton Marris had spoken to a variety of partners to inform this work, and had established that the overriding principle is credibility, or the demonstrated ability to turn expertise into impact. The other principles stemming from the research were:

- Trustworthiness
 - Mutual understanding
 - Influencing
 - Discretion/judgement
 - Consistency
 - Passion for change.
- 4.3 Stanton Marris are extremely confident that this is the right list of principles to ensure the LSC's improved relations with partners. The future LSC recruitment process will reflect them, and local partnership teams are being taken through a workshop on how to integrate the principles into everyday working.
- 4.4 Robert Smith was thanked for the update, especially as he had to condense it into a reduced time slot. Committee members were invited to comment.
- 4.5 The principles are extremely worthy, however, members were interested to know what behaviour would look like behind the words. Robert Smith agreed that this was a crucial aspect to get right, but advised that a lengthy manual would not be appropriate. Rather, guiding descriptors would be employed.
- 4.6 A "top to bottom" change will be needed if this is to succeed.
- 4.7 The Committee agreed that the principles are a good first step towards a culture change as far as relations with partners are concerned. Full integration into management practices is now what is key.

Item 5. Local Council Plans

- 5.1 Committee member John Rourke gave an update on the work of the small Council sub-committee set up to look at local LSC plans.
- 5.2 He explained that the sub-committee undertook a quality assurance role and looked at a sample of plans. This year they had looked at nine. The group's main role was to ensure that the LSC's priorities are contained within the plans.
- 5.3 The format of the sample plans this year had been better than in previous years, with sharper focus. Even the sample revealed large local variations though, particularly as far as Level 2 achievement is concerned.
- 5.4 In summary, there were three points:
- The format had led to sharper focus. Both numbers and percentages had been included, and there is clear indication of local ownership of targets
 - The plans reveal an improved grasp of the notion of a cohort
 - There is not sufficient attention given to what actions will be taken in relation to the NEET cohort.
- 5.5 The Chairman thanked John Rourke for the update, and gave a brief explanation of the new arrangements for approving local plans, which involved the new Regional Boards in the process.

Item 6. Chairman's Report

- 6.1 The Chairman advised that this item would be a regular agenda item from now on. It was intended as an opportunity for him to update the Committee on National Council activity and any other activities he undertakes on behalf of the Committee of which they might not necessarily be aware.
- 6.2 In order to save time at this particular meeting, however, the Chairman said he would write to members giving the update.

Item 7. Director of Learning's Report (Paper YPLC 03/2006)

- 7.1 Melanie Hunt introduced this report that provided the Committee with an update on matters relevant to the Committee and a summary of work of interest to the Committee which does not appear elsewhere on the agenda.
- 7.2 The Committee noted in particular that there had been a meeting of officials involved in provision for Learners with Learning Difficulties and/or Disabilities, which had agreed that joined up thinking and action "on the ground" was key and could be accomplished through Children's Trusts and other initiatives. The need for a cross-departmental strategy was recognised.
- 7.3 The Committee was invited to comment on any areas in the report.
- 7.4 Comments were kept minimal due to time restrictions, the main ones being:
 - Paragraph 17 of the report was welcomed – this paragraph advised that a follow up to the PMDU review of the Level 2 at 19 PSA target revealed evidence of close and integrated working between local LSCs, providers and partners
 - Increased Flexibility Programme – moves towards its integration have been suggested before. Pilots have been successful, but it is not yet fully integrated.

Item 8. Education Maintenance Allowance – update on extension (Paper YPLC 02/2006)

- 8.1 Trevor Fellowes introduced this paper that gave an overview of the current position on EMAs, and an update on the implementation of the EMA Extension to LSC-funded Entry to Employment and Programme-Led Pathways, going live in April 2006.
- 8.2 The Committee noted that 10% of the LSC's budget is used on EMAs, and so far there is on-target take up.
- 8.3 Trevor Fellowes outlined how EMAs are impacting on three key areas:

Participation

- A 2% increase in participation was predicted as a result of EMA last year, and figures indicate this has been achieved. The EMA pilot raised participation by 1.5%.
- This means that EMA has already had the bulk of its impact.
- However, more can probably be done to reach the partially engaged and the "marginal" group.

Attendance

- Evidence suggests EMAs are promoting a habit of good attendance.

Attainment

- It is rather too early to draw any firm conclusions on this, but anecdotal evidence suggests attainment is being driven up.
 - Encouragingly, there is no evidence that take up is “only for the money”.
- 8.4 The extension of the availability of EMAs to those in unwaged training will mean, in real terms, that families with an income of less than £30,000 per annum will have their income almost doubled.
- 8.5 Some groups will miss out, however. Those on the minimum training allowance (with family incomes of over £30,000) will not be eligible for an EMA. It is estimated that this applies to about 10% of the cohort.
- 8.6 Approximately 75%, however, will be in a better position.
- 8.7 The extension to EMAs will facilitate greater involvement with Connexions.
- 8.8 The Committee thanked Trevor Fellowes for the update, and did not feel it necessary to comment other than to confirm the positive impact EMAs are having on attendance. It was also noted that the ending of ESF funding for these particular young people would also have an impact.

Item 9. 2007 Spending Review Priorities

- 9.1 Jim Minogue joined the meeting to update the Committee on Spending Review 2007 processes and priorities.
- 9.2 He explained that the next Comprehensive Spending Review (CSR) had been postponed to 2007, but in the meantime there will be baseline reviews of targeted areas. This may impact on the LSC Grant Letter for 2007-08. If it does, the impact will be two fold:
- Adult funding systems
 - 14-19 funding systems
- 9.3 Draft Terms of Reference for the baseline review are in place. The DfES is attempting to maintain its allowance, but the Treasury is requesting it to release monies. The 14-19 baseline Review is intending to look at:
- Cost of curriculum choice
 - Funding differences between sectors - the “level playing field”
 - Alignment of capital and development budgets between LSC and Local Authorities
 - Balance between contestability and choice
 - Joining up of budgets for 14-19 reform
 - Disengaged young people.
- 9.4 The Committee was grateful for the update and welcomed news of the Review. Members had a number of comments.
- 9.5 Funding needs to recognise that General Further Education can, and does, impact on a number of areas other than straightforward learning. For

instance, it can have a positive effect on community cohesion, leading in turn to minimising the threat of terrorism for example.

- 9.6 Some members expressed concern over meeting the costs of delivering the 14-19 Implementation Plan and the White Paper.
- 9.7 It should not be forgotten that reducing the disengagement of young people impacts on other areas, and leads to savings in those areas. Therefore, arguments for sufficient funding to be put into this crucial work must be made strongly. Members were pleased to note that this argument had been put forward to the Treasury by the DfES.
- 9.8 The budget and LSC guarantees do not tally. The budget funds the 80% target, but the LSC claims to serve 100% of young people. There is a fundamental issue of appropriate budget size.
- 9.9 The Chairman thanked the Committee for its comments. He confirmed that this issue will be taken to the National Council which will provide a further opportunity to emphasise the points.

Item 10. Youth Green Paper next steps

- 10.1 Gordon McKenzie joined the meeting to present to the Committee on the vision of the Youth Green Paper (*Youth Matters*). The Chairman welcomed Gordon but had to leave the meeting at that point. Chairmanship for the remainder of the meeting was passed to John Rourke.
- 10.2 Gordon explained that the vision of *Youth Matters* was, in summary, to achieve a radically reformed system, resulting in an improved youth offer, encapsulating support and opportunity but also challenge where necessary. There had been a record response to consultation with young people, and a very good response from consulted organisations and professionals.
- 10.3 There was a clear commitment to ensure *Youth Matters* is fully aligned with other Government strategies.
- 10.4 The presentation then concentrated on two key areas within the Green Paper: the proposed Youth Opportunity Card; and Connexions transition.
- 10.5 Gordon McKenzie explained that work is currently ongoing to select 10 pilot areas for the Youth Opportunity Card, and an announcement was expected in the next few weeks. He added that each young person will get a card, but monthly “top ups” will be given to disadvantaged youngsters only. It was acknowledged that the card may not prove successful, but the pilots were expected to show whether or not it would be.
- 10.6 Connexions transition would need to be managed locally. The Local Authority as provider would be key here. Local decisions would flow from Local Area Agreements.
- 10.7 Finally, Gordon outlined the timescales and next steps. A Government “Next Steps” response was expected very soon, together with guidance on the Youth Opportunity Fund and Youth Capital Fund.
- 10.8 John Rourke thanked Gordon for the presentation, and asked him to outline the process for selecting Opportunity Card pilot areas. The Committee noted that 60 expressions of interest had been assessed, and the figure had been

shortlisted to about 25 around one month ago. That number will be cut down to 18, from which 10 will be selected.

10.9 The Committee was very keen to ensure that all existing pilots were aligned. It was felt that the conjunction of 2 or 3 pilots may ultimately have more impact than individual pilots.

10.10 Gordon McKenzie noted the Committee's concern – emanating from direct experience “in the field” – that delivery capacity may be lost during the Connexions transition. The Committee asked that this be monitored, but was reassured to learn that Government offices were being asked to focus strongly on their transition plans, and establish realistic costings.

Item 11. Minutes of the last meeting

11.1 These were agreed as an accurate record.

Item 12. Matters arising

12.1 There were none.

Item 13. Any other business

13.1 There was none.

Item 14. Date of next meeting

14.1 This was noted as 10/11 April 2006 in London.

Publication no.

Meeting chair Ian Ferguson

Minute taker Sue Randall

Date created 7 March 2006

Document ref. G:\Chairmans
Division\Secretariat\COMMITTEES\YPLC\2006
meetings\060224\nat-youngpeopleslearningcommittee-
publicminutes-24feb2006.doc