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Leading learning and skills

North West 14 - 19 Employer Engagement Strategy 2006-07

January 2006
For partners, stakeholders and employers



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John Korzeniewski
Regional Director - North West

Introduction

If the UK is to increase its competitiveness, the development of a skilled workforce for the future is essential. The Learning and Skills Council (LSC) and its partners in the North West must ensure that the learning provided for young people meets the current and future needs of the local economy.

Employers say that they need more skilled young people to meet the ever-higher skills demands of business. This can only be achieved if the relationship with employers is strengthened so that they feel they have a stake in ensuring the 'employability' and relevant skills of those entering the workforce for the first time.

This strategy is designed for consultation with partners, stakeholders and employers with the aim of developing a North West approach to employer engagement at 14-19 and to outline priority areas for action. It is intended to guide the development of future activities and to assist partners to align their strategies and funding in this important area of work.

'We want to put employers in the driving seat – nationally, regionally and locally. We must talk their language, understand their needs and design training to meet those needs'.

Mark Haysom Chief Executive Learning and Skills Council. The Learning and Skills Council's Annual Report and Accounts for 2003-2004

We want to challenge providers and partners to show how they are responding to employers' requirements. We also want to challenge employers to say where their needs are not being met and how they feel they can get involved to improve the situation.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "J. M. Korzeniewski". The signature is written in a cursive style.

John Korzeniewski,
Regional Director - North West
Learning and Skills Council

Background and Vision

In line with the White paper: '14:19 Education and Skills' published in February 2005, the LSC and its partners wish to see young people accessing a distinct mix of specialist and general pathways that enable them to move freely across a range of provision with effective support, success and progression.

Such 14-19 provision is based upon an integrated system of local partnership clusters in which colleges, schools and training providers work together to meet the needs of learners and the local economy.

In this document we focus on the specific relationship between these 14 -19 partnerships and employers. The challenge for the LSC and its partners is to take forward this vision in the North West and ensure that we understand the future needs of employers and encourage their participation in developing their workforce.

The LSC's Annual Statement of Priorities published in November 2005 highlights the importance of 'making learning truly demand led so that it better meets the needs of employers, young people and adults.

'In particular through our partnerships and collaboration we will increase the number of employers involved in 14-19 education and training, influencing curriculum development, providing Apprenticeships, support to young people and structured work placements.'

In order to achieve this a programme of activities will be developed which:

- defines and promotes the benefits and opportunities for employers to get involved in the design and management of vocational learning
- increases collaboration between providers to improve responsiveness to employer needs; and
- increases and improves ways for employers to get involved in providing a wider choice of vocational routes including provision of Apprenticeship opportunities.

Case Study

Supporting the practical elements of GCSE coursework through links with employers – Greater Manchester

Year 10 students studying GCSE Applied Business at The Swinton High School in Salford have undertaken visits, organised by the local Business Education Partnership, to two contrasting businesses to help support the practical elements of their GCSE coursework. The primary focus of the visits was to consider the importance of communications and teamwork in ensuring the efficient operational outcomes of the organisations to meet the companies' business aims and objectives.

The students visited Worsley Marriott Hotel and Parris Wood Megabowl to experience how the two different customer service operations fulfilled their roles. At both locations, students were taken to a variety of different departments and were able to talk to a wide range of staff about their roles and responsibilities in the workplace.

It became very clear that there was great importance placed, within the companies, on inter-departmental communications and the absolute need to focus on the customer. The students were able, with the use of company spreadsheets, to evaluate how the businesses met business aims and objectives, but also remained profitable. The very significant use of IT in the operation of the businesses was also highlighted. The importance of staff training and development was included in the overview so that customer service remained at the centre of the companies' objectives.

It was vitally important for students studying Applied GCSEs to experience at first-hand the environments in which business takes place – it supported their understanding of such concepts as supply and demand, cost/benefit analysis and benefits-of-scale. They also gained a great deal by meeting and interacting directly with the personnel whose work could be observed and then understood.

Strategic Background

The Government's national skills strategy '21st Century Skills: Realising Our Potential' published in July 2003 focused particularly on the adult skills development but recognised the important role of 14-19 provision in developing the workforce of the future.

Work in this area has been taken forward through the Tomlinson Review and the resulting 14-19 Education and Skills White Paper published 23 February 2005, the review of Enterprise and Economy carried out by Sir Howard Davies which looked at enterprise in education, the review of Education Business Link Organisations (EBLO), the Skills White Paper of 22 March 2005 and the Youth Matters Green Paper of July 2005.

A common and particularly striking theme within the documents is that young people and schools are often receptive to enterprise and work-relevant learning alongside the curriculum but schools do not always have the capacity or confidence to deliver this without the support of employers.

In analysing these various strategies there are a number of key strands pertaining to the engagement of employers in the 14 – 19 agenda. These include the need to:

- ensure that learning programmes enable all young people to develop the 'employability' skills, attitudes and attributes that employers seek
- develop vocational programmes and pathways with the involvement of employers to offer coherent delivery of the knowledge and skills needed by different employment sectors
- enhance the status of vocational education
- ensure the provision of high quality and impartial careers education and guidance
- create relevant, structured work experience and work-placements
- ensure work-related learning at Key Stage 4
- raise the quality and effectiveness of Apprenticeships as the primary vocational option for young people

- promote an enterprise culture which sees stronger links between business and schools giving pupils a better understanding of their future role and responsibility in the economic community; and
- increase the professional development of teachers and advisers.

All of these strands highlight the fact that in order to build the workforce of the future, public agencies such as the LSC and its partners need to understand and be responsive to the needs of the economy.

For this to be effective, however, it is also necessary to encourage greater involvement and responsibility from employers in the design, management and delivery of relevant courses for young people. Both the 14-19 and Skills White papers highlight the key role to be played by the LSC and its partners, locally and regionally, in helping employers engage with 14-19 education and training.

Employer engagement, therefore, relates to the positive involvement of employers in all types of learning provision for 14-19 year olds. This could be in the design and delivery of specialised Diplomas as well as participation in schemes, which provide opportunities for young people to learn at work and outside school, such as Apprenticeships or work placements.

It is worth pointing out that employer engagement is just as relevant to schools and 6th Form Colleges as it is to further education and other training providers and the 14-19 White Paper highlights how increased collaboration will benefit all partners. Choices made at 14 and 16, whether for academic or vocational courses or as part of a mix as envisaged in the 14-19 White Paper, all have implications for future employment. Whatever route or pathway is chosen, the link to employment can and should be made. This will demand close liaison between those offering advice and guidance, schools/colleges and employers or their representatives.

Much activity is already underway in this area but more needs to be done to integrate the work already going on to ensure that learning is truly demand-led and that all 14-19 year olds have access to high quality learning opportunities relevant to the needs of employers they are about to join.

North West Economy

The development of the workforce of the future will be dependent on sound planning based on anticipated needs of the economy and the translation of this demand into appropriate guidance and provision for young people.

The importance to employers of engaging with the 14-19 agenda can be seen by looking at the economic drivers affecting business in the North West. These include the requirements of key sectors, which do not always coincide with the preferences of young people or with the provision on offer. This can be compounded by the demographic factors of an ageing workforce being replaced by fewer young people entering the workforce.

4.1 Economic Context

The performance of the North West economy has improved over the last few years and now appears to have outperformed the UK as a whole in 2003 and 2004¹. However, to maintain pace the LSC must ensure that employers have access to the best quality workforce in terms of skills and qualifications.

4.2 Demographic Trends

The North West has a total population of 6.8 million, which accounts for 11.8 per cent of the total UK population. It is the largest region outside London and the South East.

By 2028 nearly one quarter of the population will be aged between 45 and retirement, compared to 21.8 per cent today². Over the same period, the number of individuals aged between 16-44 will fall by around 4 percentage points resulting in a further tightening of the labour market and will give rise to acute labour shortages particularly for lower level occupations.

Employers will have to turn increasingly towards the younger generation to meet their future recruitment needs. Young people are set to become a valuable asset to many employers in the future.

4.3 Employer Engagement

Currently 85.6 per cent of young people who leave school at 16 in the North West continue in some form of learning³. A large percentage, 70.8 per cent, continue on in full-time education, with a further 10.5 per cent gaining employment with training. However, there still remains a small proportion of young people (2.8%) that drop out of learning even though they are in employment.

Figures from the 2004 National Employers Survey indicate that currently 7.5 per cent of North West employers have an apprentice(s) either employed or on placement with them.

Although this figure is higher than the national average of 5.7 per cent, much work still needs to be done in order to get more employers to see the benefits of training and developing young people as an effective way of filling current and future skills gaps within their existing workforces.

4.4 Future Employment Trends

Most key sectors are expected to see growth slow in 2005 and beyond, particularly the service sectors such as retailing and hotels & catering and business services. In comparison the financial and business services sector, which has been one of the main drivers behind the North West economy over the last few years, will continue to growth albeit at a slower rate than in previous years. The long-term decline in the manufacturing, engineering and construction sectors is expected to continue. For most occupations and sectors replacement demand will dominate expansion demand⁴.

Although we do not want young people to have to specialise too early, it is important that they are made aware of the sectors where there will be job opportunities in the future.

4.4.1 Business Services⁵

The sector relies upon professionally qualified individuals and as such has a good record of supporting individuals to obtain the necessary qualifications. However, for lower level occupations, take-up of level 2 qualifications has reduced further from what was already a low base. Support for Apprenticeships is described as poor.

4.4.2 Hospitality, Leisure, Travel and Tourism⁶

The sector as a whole has a young workforce. Nationally one third of employees employed in the sector are aged between 16-24 and just under 1/5th are aged between 16-19. A large proportion of the workforce are students working part-time in elementary occupations such as waiting staff, bar staff and kitchen assistants. One of the key issues for the sector is to encourage young people to develop a career in the sector once they finish their full-time education.

4.4.3 Retail⁷

Competition from other sectors is leading larger retailers to look to recruit older individuals – nationally 12 per cent of the sector's workforce is aged 55+. However this group is not always equipped with the right skills and experience to meet modern needs. The sector needs to change its image in order to attract young and old alike. In order to achieve this, it will need to shake off its perceived image held by many individuals of low wages, very little training and too few career opportunities.

4.4.4 Health and Social Care⁸

The increasing public demand for health and social care services has led to strong growth within this sector over the last few years. Recruitment to the sector has proved difficult for a variety of reasons, but for young people in particular, the lack of 'work readiness' skills is a common issue.

4.4.5 Manufacturing⁹

Although further decline of the manufacturing sector is forecast, it will still continue to make a substantial contribution to the regions economy. However, 40 per cent of the current workforce is aged 45+ and this will present the sector with serious skills gaps in the future. Like other sectors, the sector needs to attract more young people, but its poor image often means it is overlooked in favour of more attractive industries.

4.4.6 Construction¹⁰

It is estimated that nationally 15 per cent of the workforce will reach retirement age over the next decade, highlighting the desperate need to attract more young people into this sector. However the demand for Apprenticeships currently outstrips the number of employers who are willing or able to train.

4.4.7 Nuclear¹¹

A high proportion of jobs in the energy sector in the North West are involved in nuclear reprocessing. Replacement demand is high and like many other sectors it has an ageing workforce. The sector needs to recruit young people, but is thwarted by the general unpopularity of engineering and physical sciences as areas of study.

4.4.8 Public Sector and Education¹²

The public sector accounts for around 6 per cent of the total employment in the North West with education accounting for a further 9 per cent. Both sectors have experienced recruitment difficulties with Local Authorities in particular having difficulties in recruiting younger individuals.

- 1 Regional Economic Forecasting Panel, Business Forecasts Northwest - Executive Briefing, May 2005.
- 2 National Statistics, Population Trends No-120, Summer 2005.
- 3 Connexions, Cheshire and Warrington - School Leaver (Yr11) Destinations Survey 2004.
- 4 Statement of North West Learning & Skills Priorities - December 2004.
- 5 Northwest Strategic Review of Skills: Finance and Professional Services Sector.
- 6 People 1st - LSC Statement of Priorities 2004/05.
- 7 Skillsmart - LSC Statement of Priorities 2004/05.
- 8 A Health Sector Workforce Market Assessment, 2003 - Skills for Health.
- 9 Process and Manufacturing Industries - LSC Statement of Priorities 2004/05.
- 10 North West Strategic Review of Skills Provision: Construction.
- 11 Nuclear & Radiological Skill Study: Report of the Nuclear Skills Group 2002. DTI.
- 12 North West Strategic Review of Skills Provision: Public Administration. North West Strategic Review of Skills Provision: Education.

North West Products and Initiatives

In addressing the issues faced in trying to engage employers to participate in the 14-19 agenda, we are not starting with a blank sheet of paper. There are a range of 'products' and services offered to employers in the North West which enable them to promote their sector, recruit young people and have support for training those entering their workforce for the first time.

These include Apprenticeships, Young Apprenticeships, Entry to Employment (E2E), Increased Flexibility programmes, work placements, specialist schools and Enterprise Learning (See Annex 1). In addition, there are many successful events and initiatives including Skill City, the Lionheart Challenge, Aimhigher and impressive local 'open evenings' put on by schools and colleges. Although these programmes do make a significant contribution to improving the progression of young people into work they often lack co-ordination and the overall strategic impact on a region like the North West can be difficult to measure.

A wide range of organisations are involved in the delivery of these activities. The key partners and stakeholders with the LSC are the Local Authorities, Connexions, schools, colleges, private training providers, Education Business Link Organisation, Princes Trust, Sector Skills Councils, Sector Skills and Productivity Alliances, Business Link, Jobcentre Plus and the North West Development Agency. Each has a critical role to play but needs to understand where it fits in with the bigger picture, how they complement others' activities and what they can expect in return.

Some organisations such as Connexions, through the Education Business Link Consortium (EBLOC) and Education Business Partnerships (EBP), do seek to provide greater coherence between the workplace and local schools and colleges. EBPs offer a range of services including industry days, mentoring, primary school projects, placements in industry for education staff and work experience but still often find themselves reliant on the goodwill of companies to participate.

The motivation for employer involvement can range from an immediate 'what's in it for me?' through to a notion of altruism to help local young people. There are mechanisms to ensure employers' needs are identified, such as the development of appropriate and relevant Apprenticeship frameworks, but generally these activities still have to be 'sold' to employers rather than employers either asking for them or participating in the development of them.

We need employers to help to provide information and guidance which is not only accurate but inspirational; Inspirational not only to students but also to parents and careers teachers and advisers. This is the challenge which needs to be addressed.

Case Study

Young Apprenticeships in Greater Merseyside

The NHS and Social Care Academy was set up in January 2003 and was born from an idea of the local HR Directors from Strategic Health Authorities (SHA's) and was developed in partnership with LSC Greater Merseyside and has been extended to areas of Cheshire. The Academy is a joint LSC and SHA funded project and aspires to provide coherent and innovative pre recruitment training programmes for the Health and Social Care Sector across the region.

The Academy is currently working in partnership with 8 local FE colleges. These are Liverpool Community College, Knowsley Community College, St.Helens College, Wirral Metropolitan, Macclesfield College, Southport College, West Cheshire College and Warrington Collegiate. Currently, the programme has engaged in excess of 340 healthcare cadets across Cheshire & Merseyside. The cadetship is a two year programme which combines academic study and work placements together, using the Apprenticeship and Advanced Apprenticeship frameworks. Placements are of high quality and are in a wide variety of NHS or Social Care settings where cadets will work under the supervision of a dedicated employer mentor.

Currently, the Cadet scheme is aimed at 16-24 year olds in Merseyside and 16-19 year olds in Cheshire. One of the key design features of the scheme is the open entry requirements. This enables young people who do not already have the academic qualifications to pursue a career in the NHS or social care sector. A recent development to support scheme is the introduction of the Young Apprenticeship Programme aimed at 14-16 year olds. Knowsley Community College in Greater Merseyside are piloting YA in Health and Social Care. Due to the high level of employer engagement in the design and development of the Academy, there is clear potential for the development of exciting and innovative progression routes for young people interested in NHS careers across the North West.

Strategic Development Models

Considerable progress has been made over the last few years to align the strategies of various organisations such as the LSC, Connexions, EBLO, Jobcentre Plus and Business Link.

Expectations have also been placed on colleges and private training providers to embed employer engagement targets within their plans. These developments are already making a contribution to the planning and strategic framework. However, to be really demand led and responsive to employers needs, a more radical approach is required.

There are a number of mechanisms which now exist which provide a possible way forward to striking an appropriate balance between the supply of 'employable' young people with the needs of specific sectors and companies. In order to be effective these models have required individual organisations and partnerships to step beyond the confines of traditional funding or restrictive remits and work together to engage with employers.

There are two types of model, which we believe offer different opportunities for effective employer engagement.

- 1 The first recognises the importance an employer places in developing its workforce through collaboration with others in its industrial sector particularly through the development of vocational pathways into their specific industry. This is particularly effective through the network of Sector Skills Councils and the development of CoVEs and similar sector based initiatives.
- 2 The second builds on the notion that employers often wish to work with young people in their own locality and come together with local schools and colleges, as well as other businesses, to promote their company. In some local office areas this is consistent with the work currently undertaken through local 14-19 planning groups which seek to widen participation and collaboration around the learner entitlement.

These two models are not mutually exclusive but we recognise different employers are likely to favour different approaches. For example, large companies are often happy to work at both a sectoral and local level but SMEs are more likely to want to work locally.

The two models are outlined in more detail below.

6.1 Sector Models

A helpful way to engage with employers has been through working with their particular industrial sector and its representatives. The creation of Sector Skills Councils

(SSCs) to provide a voice for the skills needs of business provides an opportunity to develop coherent strategies for each sector. (e.g. SEMTA - engineering, CITB - Construction, Improve – Food and Drink and Cogent - Chemicals).

In the North West this has been taken one step further through the Sector Skills and Productivity Alliances (SSPAs), which bring together all the key players in the development and delivery to meet those skills needs including the SSCs, NWDA, LSC, Business Link, Chambers and key employers. The specific needs of sectors are identified further through the new Sector Skills Agreements, the first four of which were published in February 2005. (Engineering, e-Skills, Creative & Media and Construction).

This is now being transferred into local activity, in particular working with colleges and private training providers to develop their future plans. There are already some good examples across the North West of how the sector approach can be supportive to the 14-19 agenda.

6.1.1 Sector Skills and Productivity Alliance Plans

All the SSPAs have identified in their plans the need to promote their sector and provide information to encourage recruitment from schools and colleges into their sector.

These include:

- improving the image of the industry sector with young people, parents and schools
- establishing/improving working relationships between employer networks and schools
- informing employers of the current qualifications and training routes for young people; and
- improving access for teacher industry days and updating teaching staff on current industry practices.

At the same time, in certain sectors including chemicals and health, considerable work is already being undertaken across the North West to develop so called 'ladders of learning' or 'skills escalators'. Whilst the core of these developments is the need to increase access for all to appropriate learning to upskill or to gain jobs in the sector, the 14 – 19 agenda has a key part to play in the early stages. This should link in with the development of the newly proposed specialised Diplomas proposed in the 14-19 White Paper, the first 4 of which (Engineering, Health & Social Care, ICT and Creative & Media) are planned for 2008. Employers will be encouraged to become involved in the development of skills escalators and Diplomas and will hopefully recognise the opportunity presented by this approach to securing the workforce they need for the future.

6.1.2 Centres of Vocational Excellence (CoVEs)

In the North West there are now nearly 50 Centres of Vocational Excellence (CoVEs) covering most industrial sectors.

A key feature in acquiring CoVE status is the requirement of employer involvement in the design, development and delivery of the curriculum. As such they provide an example of the way in which the 'demand led' agenda can be taken forward. Although CoVEs focus primarily on delivering skills at level 3 to adults, to be effective they also have to demonstrate progression into the provision from level 2 and strong links with local schools.

This link to the 14-19 agenda has resulted in the alignment of the Increased Flexibility Programme, specialist schools and improved promotion of the sector through partnership with other agencies. It is a process of integration and co-operation which ensures the sustainability of individual initiatives with a clear end goal of the development of a workforce relevant to industry needs.

The current CoVE programme is nearing its end but the principles of employer engagement enshrined within it are now being disseminated both within institutions and beyond to other providers. The 14-19 White Paper and the recent Skills White Paper both identify how this can be taken further through increased collaboration between specialist schools, colleges and CoVES and by accreditation of providers' responsiveness to business. The aim will be to provide a network of centres of expertise at national, regional and local level. This network will also be supported by new national Skills Academies in each key vocational area.

6.2 Area based models

In some cases, engagement of employers in the 14-19 agenda requires a model based on a specific geographic area. This recognises the importance and relevance of local business to young people and employers alike, both of whom can see the benefits in local recruitment and job opportunities. Furthermore this approach has the merit of building on existing strong community links between schools, providers and local industry.

The area approach operates at both a sub regional and local level. Each of the North West sub regions (Cheshire & Warrington, Cumbria, Greater Manchester, Greater Merseyside and Lancashire) have their own distinct partnership relationships to reflect the local economy.

At a more local level each sub region has a number of local 14-19 planning groups which bring together the LSC, the LAs, Connexions, colleges, work-based learning providers, schools and sixth form colleges. These planning groups

recognise that provision for learners aged 14-19 must be based upon an integrated system of local partnership clusters in which colleges, schools and training providers work together to meet the needs of the local community and economy.

However, in order to achieve these aims, it is vital that all stakeholders are involved in implementing 14-19 developments within the area. As well as the development of an appropriate vocational curriculum, a key part of this work will also be with schools and sixth form colleges to demonstrate the linkage between academic GCSEs and the world of work. This will build on existing good practice in the North West which highlights the various progression routes possible from school to employment.

For this approach to be effective, employers must be brought into the process to ensure that provision accurately and appropriately reflects the needs of the employment sectors in the local area.

Case Study

Warrington 14-19 Pathfinder Project

The Warrington pathfinder project is aimed at addressing key skills shortages and supporting employer engagement through the vehicle of the Warrington learning partnership. A key aim of the project is to address the mismatch between local employment opportunities and the gaps in the 14-19 Curriculum as addressed within the KPMG Warrington Area Study. The project is focusing on the existing and emerging skills shortages in the health care, construction, retail, business, manufacturing, telecommunications, sports, sciences and hospitality sectors.

To address these shortages the project has introduced a series of work-related activities aimed at involving a significant number of employers more directly within the 14-19 agenda to capitalise on local employment opportunities.

Partners in these activities include the local authority, LSC, schools, Warrington Collegiate, Priestley College, Education Business Plus, Citizens Advice Bureau, NHS, CITB, Retail Sector Skills Council and Warrington Wolves.

6.3 Lifelong Learning Network

The current plans to create a number of Lifelong Learning Networks (LLN) in the North West offer an opportunity to link both the sectoral and local approaches. Part of the LLN seeks to provide 14-18 year olds with a clear vocational route to access higher education. It will deliver a combination of an enhanced curriculum offer, including new foundation degrees, based on 5 sectors of regional skills shortage* and local delivery through HE, FE and new Learning in the Community (LINC) centres in areas of social deprivation

It is intended that all learners from the age of 14 will have access to vocationally orientated educational pathways which have real employment 'currency'. In order to achieve this goal, the business community via Sector Skills Councils will be engaged to identify business needs.

***Health & Social care, Environmental and Bio-Sciences, Business Enterprise and Public Services, Sports, and Creative and Cultural Industries/ICT.**

Case Study

The Eric Wright Learning Foundation - Lancashire

Major infrastructure developments in Lancashire mean that construction is a priority sector for skill development.

In the South Ribble area, a group of secondary and special school headteachers had been working together to provide a greater range of vocational courses as part of local 14-19 curriculum developments. Although many students had participated in Increased Flexibility programmes offered by local post-16 providers, there was significant unmet demand from students aged 14-16 to access a vocational experience in construction. The headteachers approached Lancashire EBP who undertook a feasibility study which included making contact with a number of local construction companies. Two South Ribble-based employers, Eric Wright Construction and Progress Housing, were keen to get involved.

Securing the initial financial support for the centre was crucial and the major contribution from Eric Wright Construction was recognised by the decision to name the centre after the company's founder.

Under the leadership of the EBP and with support from Lancashire Local Authority, LSC in Lancashire and local post-16 providers, the vision of the headteachers and employers became a reality when the Eric Wright Learning Foundation enrolled its first students in September 2005. The Foundation is now set up as a company limited by guarantee with a Board made up of the partners involved in its establishment who also provided funding. In the first year of operation, construction courses are being provided for 250 young people and there are plans to expand the facilities next year to offer a wider range of construction provision.

Strategic Development Models

Proposed Actions for 2006-2007

The two approaches outlined above provide a helpful basis for specific actions to increase employer engagement in 14-19. It is, therefore, proposed that work continues to develop the sector/CoVE partnerships and through sub regional and local 14-19 planning groups.

It is also proposed that each sub region should develop its own 14-19 employer engagement plan with activities which respond to the particular needs of the local economy.

There are two overarching activities which should be undertaken within each sub regional plan.

- For **sector/CoVE partnerships** we need to ensure that the plans for each incorporate specific action to engage employers in activities to promote and involve young people in their sector.
- Each **local area planning group** should establish, as part of its plan, specific actions to work with employers to develop the appropriate local curriculum incorporating these diplomas and encourage them to offer more opportunities to young people to learn at work and outside school.

In order to engage employers effectively within the strategic framework identified above the LSC intends to work with partners regionally and locally on a range of activities which:

- define and **promote the benefits and opportunities for employers** to get involved in the design and management of vocational learning
- **increases collaboration between providers** to improve responsiveness to employer needs; and
- **increases and improves ways for employers to get involved** in providing a wider choice of vocational routes including provision of Apprenticeship opportunities.

These activities will be developed at a sub regional level and local level through 5 local action plans. Co-ordination will be maintained across the North West to share good practice and, where appropriate, to develop region-wide initiatives. Annex 2 gives examples of possible actions.

Case study

West Lakes Increased Flexibility Partnership - Cumbria

The West Lakes Increased Flexibility Partnership has been running successful Young Apprenticeship programmes in engineering and business administration and has worked closely with employers to provide a meaningful vocational experience for the young Apprentices. All the employers – AMEC, BNFL, Corus, Iggesund Paperboard and Surface Specialities have proven commitment to training young people and many years experience in delivering Apprenticeship programmes. Alongside the 50 days work placement required of the young engineering Apprentices the programme has been enriched by visits to local engineering businesses to view various technologies used in engineering and design and manufacture. They also have the option of extra curricular engineering related clubs and competitions to develop enterprise skills.

Learners are expected to achieve an NVQ level 2 outcome and are then guaranteed an interview with GEN 11 the training provider. In a recent evaluation the engineering young Apprentices said they felt that they had a better chance of getting a good paid job and getting an NVQ 2 before leaving school.

The Young Apprenticeship programme has given young people the opportunity to experience a real work environment, gain a qualification and step ahead with an Apprenticeship. Schools have had the opportunity to engage directly with employers and employers have had the chance to interact and work with schools and young people in a direct and meaningful way.

Annex 1

Products and initiatives available in the North West linking employers and 14-19

Apprenticeships

This is the flagship programme to promote a work-based learning route with employers and offers benefits not only for young people to 'earn and 'learn' but also to the employer who is able to access relevant high level training support to develop a young person entering the workforce.

Young Apprenticeships enable pupils aged 14 and 15 years to have extended experience of work and pursue vocational qualifications in other learning settings, whilst continuing with their core curriculum.

Entry to Employment (E2E)

E2E supports young people, primarily between the ages of 16-19 who are not yet ready or able to enter Apprenticeship programmes, or a level 2 programme or employment directly. Programmes include basic and/or key skills, vocational development and personal and social development.

Increased Flexibility Programme

The Increased Flexibility Programme (IFP) addresses the fact that vocational education remains undervalued and provides work-related learning for 14-16 year olds including study at a college or training provider. It leads to recognised qualifications such as GCSEs in vocational subjects and other vocational awards.

Enterprise learning

The government is keen to promote an enterprise culture. It wants to see stronger links between business and schools, giving pupils a better understanding of their future role and responsibility in the economic community.

The aim of the new work-related learning element of Key Stage 4 include enabling all young people to be enterprising and to support enterprise in others. The new educational entitlement will, from 2005/06, also provide all pupils with the equivalent of 5 days enterprise experience by the end of Key Stage 4. This experience will aim to develop enterprise capability including innovation, creativity, risk management and risk taking, and financial and business understanding.

Enterprise Advisers

Enterprise advisers have a key role to support and influence headteachers and their senior management teams in order to ensure that enterprise education is embedded throughout the curriculum. In addition to this they will have representation on local 14-19 steering groups in order to influence and help to develop area wide enterprise education strategies.

Lionheart Challenge

The Lionheart Challenge was designed to raise business awareness amongst young people and develop the skills, knowledge and experience of enterprise.

Extended Schools

An extended school is one that provides a range of activities and services, often beyond the school day, to help meet the needs of its pupils, their families and the wider community. Can include local career development opportunities.

Discretionary Funding Projects (LIDF, ESF)

The LSC uses its discretionary funding to develop innovative and pilot projects which support the identified skills needs requirements of sectors in the local area. This includes projects targeted specifically at promoting a sector among young people in partnership with local business and its representatives.

Education Business Links Organisation Consortium/ Education Business Partnerships

Education Business Links Organisation Consortia (EBLOC) and Education Business Partnerships (EBP) were formed in response to the Government's calls for greater coherence with education business link activities. The aim of the consortium is to develop and enhance partnerships, which make vital links between the workplace and local schools and colleges. By working together towards the same goals, businesses and education can help meet the needs of local young people during their preparation for adult and working life. Services offered include industry days, occupational talks, mentoring, primary school projects, placements in industry for education staff and work experience.

Young Enterprise

Young Enterprise runs a range of business and enterprise education programmes including company/team programmes, Learn to Earn, Enterprise Masterclasses etc.

Aimhigher

Aimhigher is a programme which seeks to bring HE to a wider audience particularly among the young. There are a number of specific projects around the region which support vocational routes to HE within schools, FE and the workplace.

Annex 2

Examples of possible 14-19 employer engagement activities for inclusion in sub regional plans

1 Define and promote the benefits and opportunities for employers to get involved in the design and management of vocational learning

Activities best taken forward by sector partnerships:

- promotion amongst employers of the issues arising from the ageing population and declining birth rate e.g. need to work through Sector Skills Council or directly with local providers to influence and develop curriculum relevant to sector. Events or literature
- promotion of sectors not generally favoured by young people or are perceived as gender specific. Sector specific events, open days, work placements, mentoring; and
- encourage employers to voice their views with regard to the quality and appropriateness of provision in their sector e.g. as ITTs developed (already done for chefs apprenticeships), consultation events.

Activities best taken forward by local area planning groups:

- promote to employers the value of vocational qualifications for all and not only as an alternative to academic routes. This should include a demonstration of the ways employers can get involved. Literature, open days
- demonstrate the benefits to employers of participation in programmes and initiatives such as Apprenticeships, Increased Flexibility Programme, work placements and teacher placements. Case studies, events with business speakers; and
- strategic meetings with key employers to hear of their experience or views on participation e.g. business breakfasts.

2 Increase collaboration between providers to improve responsiveness to employer needs

Activities best taken forward by sector partnerships:

- extend the existing North West CoVE network to include local specialist schools and 14-16 Increased Flexibility Programme. Map and broaden existing CoVE partnerships.

Activities best taken forward by local area planning groups:

- partnership between organisations engaging with employers to promote common message and 'no wrong door' approach
- major event for stakeholders to discuss issues arising in this strategy and how best to address them collaboratively
- increase understanding between organisations working to support 14-19 year olds into the work place e.g. Connexions, EBLO, colleges, private training providers, Jobcentre Plus, Chambers of Commerce and schools
- LSC to ensure that the organisations it funds align their strategies both with the LSC and with each other e.g. Connexions, EBLOC
- alignment with partner strategies e.g. Jobcentre Plus, NWDA, Business Link, to reflect 14-19 employer engagement; and
- explore ways to develop a 'single validation process' for providers for vetting work placements to meet CRB and H&S requirements.

3 Increase and improve ways for employers to get involved in providing a wider choice of vocational routes for young people including Apprenticeship opportunities

Activities best taken forward by sector partnerships:

- involve employers in updating the vocational pathways leaflets produced in 2004. Test existing literature with employers
- expand on the existing CoVEs to promote employer engagement in 14-19 agenda. Work with employers currently involved in CoVEs through existing fora
- ensure all SSPA sector models developed across the North West include planning for appropriate and relevant courses supported by promotion and advice and guidance for young people. LSC sector leads to ensure in plans and engage with existing employer sector partnerships
- integration of work placements with vocational choices and pathways
- development of curriculum models with SSCs and employers to feed into proposed 14-19 Diplomas
- continue to promote Apprenticeships amongst employers as a major opportunity to plan their future workforce
- build on Young Apprenticeship pilots in key sectors; and
- support and promote involvement in the regional Skill City event to enable individual employers and sector partnerships to promote in an inspirational way the opportunities for young people in their sector.

Activities best taken forward by local area planning groups:

- the development of an award for employers to reflect their participation in 14-19 activities. A young peoples' IIP?
- develop joint 14-19 'compact' with employers to identify what is offered to employers and the reciprocal commitment expected from them. A mix of employer and learner entitlement?
- develop small scale employer programmes at local level through 14-19 planning groups and using EBLO structure. Focus on key local sectors?
- improve employers understanding of what is happening in schools and colleges. This can be achieved through invitations to employers and employer organisations to attend 'recruitment and open evenings to update knowledge on facilities, equipment and curriculum offered by local institutions
- increase opportunities for teachers and lecturers to update their knowledge through placements with employers
- encourage and support applications for national awards such as Apprentice of the Year and National Training Awards; and
- develop and promote the Lifelong Learning Network in the North West.

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