



Leading learning and skills

# Consultation of the North West Region Skills for Life Strategy

## February 2007

### Background and Introduction

The North West Skills for Life Strategy was developed by the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) and circulated for consultation to partners and stakeholders. This consultation period has been an opportunity for a wider range of partners to comment upon, and contribute to, the strategy prior to its publication in March 2007.

The strategy was circulated to 68 strategic partners and stakeholders for comment. Some acted as umbrella organisations and shared the document with their networks. This enabled even wider consultation during the period 5 January 2007 to 5 February 2007.

### Summary of Responses

The LSC received 22 responses by close of consultation period. Breakdown by type of organisation is as follows:

- Sector Skills/Employers 3
- Further Education providers 6
- Work-based learning providers 1
- Ufl (Learndirect) 1
- Adult and community learning providers 1
- Voluntary and community organisations 3
- Regional partners 6
- Local authorities 1

All responses were in support of the aims of the strategy and most took the opportunity to inform the LSC as to how their organisation can support the activities within the implementation plan.

Several areas were highlighted as needing further development or refinement:

- **further underpinning data** is needed to support the strategy. For example the number of migrant workers in the region and the importance of more recent data on level of need for literacy, numeracy and language.
- the need to **acknowledge the time** it takes for learners with very low level skills to progress towards attainment of a target-related qualification.
- the importance of **Sector Skills Councils** to embrace the Skills for Life Strategy and to reflect this in their sector skills agreements, to truly ensure engagement and inclusion of Skills for Life within their proposed qualification frameworks.
- the need to **monitor the qualitative impact** Skills for Life has with employers and the difference it Skills for Life training makes to services, the bottom line and the need to develop contextualised approaches and materials to allow this to be achieved.
- the changes to funding to support **ESOL** programmes requires further clarification.
- continual **professional development** of Skills for Life deliverers remains a priority, particularly capacity building of vocational tutors and those working in the voluntary and community sector

Outlined below are comments and suggestions made by respondents against each of the key objectives:

**Key Objective 1 - To increase adult achievements through the delivery of a curriculum that is appropriate to the need and attainment level.**

- Baseline data being used is out of date. (Data used was from DfES Skills for Life Survey 2003 which was the last to be published.)
- LSC to consider the implication of learners progressing from pre-entry to qualifications counting towards PSA targets, the timescales and possibility of non achievement when setting targets so as not to disadvantage certain sectors of the community.
- LSC urged to disaggregate data further to show how much Entry Level 1, 2 and pre entry qualifications were being supported. This would be extremely useful in informing future commissioning.
- Consideration to the implications of the Leitch Report when commissioning Skills for Life qualifications. Being employer driven may prevent the provider from meeting the local community needs.
- It is important that engagement with adult learners is responsive to the demands of both employers (no matter how large or small) and learners to maximise the availability of work based and other vocationally linked HE opportunities.
- LLUK research data on the Skills for Life workforce will contribute to the assessment of whether capacity to deliver meets the identified need in the North West Region.

- There is potentially a tension between the model for first test pass, value for money and the curriculum required to widen participation and increase volumes.
- Supporting and promoting adult apprenticeships and identifying more options to embed Skills for Life into occupational qualifications is required.

## **Key Objective 2 – To influence employer engagement strategies to embed Skills for Life**

- Pursuit of opportunities to assist the development of significant and distinctive niche Skills for Life specialities in certain sectors will better serve the needs of learners and employer organisations.
- More contextualisation of learning materials are needed so they are relevant to employers and employees.
- Teachers and trainers require additional ‘specialist’ training to support embedding.
- Contextualise the Employer Toolkit for sectors and develop projects with Move on Up for development of contextualised materials.
- Support Skills for Life development particularly Whole Organisation Approach via senior management.
- Named member of staff responsible for embedding Skills for Life in the workplace as part of the Whole Organisation Approach to Strategy.
- North West Get On Awards for local authorities’ self assessment to be adapted for use in other sectors
- Promote adult apprenticeships.
- Regional Strategic Partnership to influence employer engagement in qualifications and skills development through 21<sup>st</sup> century technology.
- The draft strategy does not reflect the power or importance of high quality Information Advice and Guidance in getting hard to reach learners and employers to take up learning to address Skills for Life needs.
- More support and encouragement to employers through Train to Gain for adults to achieve Skills for Life qualifications within an appropriate skills programme for new entrants such as ex offenders, Job Centre Plus clients and those economically inactive.
- Support needed for Train to Gain brokerage service.
- Support progression of qualifications and employability as a powerful means to achieving increased outputs and targets.
- The message should be clear that individuals are being helped with Skills for Life - this should not be covert, Skills for Life is about communication.
- Capacity to deliver is an issue and there needs to be more investment in providers.
- Sector Skills representatives should actually visit workplaces to give support and guidance on how to implement Skills for Life within the workplace.
- More flexibility in the delivery of employer – led Skills for Life programmes particularly in the use of e - learning.
- Future business investment and expansion will require appropriate and meaningful pathways for local people to train in growth sectors.
- Promotion of “Test the Company” assessment approach.
- Monitoring the impact – although there is a need to collect quantitative data on achievements, it is also important to collect qualitative information around the difference made to service and quality. This can be used to influence senior management on the importance of Skills for Life learning.
- Employers with Migrant Workers need specific training programmes.

### **Key Objective 3: To support on-going quality improvements of Skills for life delivery.**

- Quality must not be compromised and more done to ensure sufficient qualified staff and expertise, if we are to meet the volumes projected.
- Recruiting qualified staff can be problematic.
- Monitor the impact of quality improvement through the delivery of Framework for Achievement (Foundation Learning Tier).
- LLUK is keen to support funding by employers and stakeholders to ensure capacity building, delivery and management of Skills for Life workforce is of the highest quality.
- LLUK's key role is to provide a framework of standards and qualifications for the lifelong learning workforce informed by need identified by other sectors through their Sector Skills Agreements (SSA) It is a key partner with the Quality Improvement Agency in developing the Quality Improvement Programme from a workforce development view.
- A Whole Organisation Approach owned by senior management and driven by them is crucial to ongoing quality improvement.
- Work Based Training providers need to have greater access to training opportunities in order to deliver quality Skills for Life programmes.
- Quality is crucial to build credibility with sectors, employers and learners.
- The Core Curriculum needs to be used more innovatively to meet individual learner need within own context, community and workplace.

### **Key Objective 4 – To improve the understanding of ESOL needs and the delivery of appropriate training.**

- It is very likely that the very people who are hardest to reach will be further disadvantaged by the introduction of fees for ESOL.
- Grave concern that ESOL needs will no longer be met if changes to ESOL funding mean charging for provision.
- The LSC should consider the length of time it takes an ESOL student to reach Entry L3 and above. It is likely to be a minimum of 3-4 years for a non English speaker to achieve Entry Level 3 competence.
- Baseline data for ESOL does not reflect current regional picture.
- LLUK working with Quality Improvement Agency to develop a Quality Improvement Programme for innovative approaches to recruitment and training of specialist Skills for Life teachers currently focussing on ESOL.

### **Key Objective 5 – To increase the number of numeracy qualifications achieved.**

- Plans are needed to recognise where numeracy is important to job roles. It also needs to be linked to national occupational standards/qualifications.
- Specific targets for numeracy achievements need to be set.
- Continue to engage with adults to improve their numeracy skills and seek accreditation by taking the Level 1 and Level 2 National Tests.
- This is a curriculum content issue for the qualifications awarded rather than a delivery capacity issue.
- The standard of those delivering numeracy, literacy, language is a workforce development issue – hence the responsibility of LLUK.

- Increase number of numeracy teachers on permanent contracts instead of session based.
- Make Maths exciting and new.
- Further investment needed in Voluntary and Community Sector provision – there are some good examples of Citizen Advice Bureau delivery of Financial Literacy.
- Requests from schools for Family Numeracy is on the increase.
- Objective is vital if North West Gross Value Added (GVA) output gap is to be closed.

**Key Objective 6 – To meet the learning needs of those target groups identified in the strategy.**

- Need to anticipate future needs and be responsive rather than reactive eg. Demands on ESOL for Migrant Workers. Supply is not meeting demand.
- Meet the needs in appropriate ways for learners across a diverse range of providers including Voluntary and Community Sector.
- IAG procedures to be implemented at all stages of contact with learners.
- Work with community partners at grass roots level to introduce appropriate and innovative engagement activities.
- Pathways being developed within new qualifications framework for teachers, tutors and learning support practitioners across lifelong learning sector to benchmark their own delivery.
- Consider the needs of Learning Support Practitioners who support the learning needs of offenders.
- More needs to be done to address offender working in custody and to identify and track the learner journey for offenders in the community.
- This has to be the whole purpose of the strategy.
- Too light commissioning may prevent a provider from meeting the local needs and hamper the very achievement of Skills for Life targets.
- LSC should consider whether market demand should decide the future funding proportions
- The issue is to encourage individuals and influencers/stakeholders to translate need into demand for Skills for Life development.

**Number 7: General questions about the whole document**

**7a: Did you find the language and terminology clear and easy to follow?**

Most respondents said - Yes or Mostly. One respondent said - No. The following comments were made:

- Language is clear for educational practitioners /managers.
- How will the strategy be shared with existing or potential learners?
- Para 16 – Local Authority Adult Education providers should be included as a stakeholder.
- All acronyms (eg PSA) should be spelt out at least once.
- Avoid jargon and adhere to principles of plain English.

**Document creator** Pauline Heron  
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