

Learning Partnerships Review 2003

Consultation Questions from the Steering Group arising from the NIACE Review Report

Contents

	Paragraph
Introduction	1
Background	6
Steering Group Consultation Questions	10
Annex A: Responses to Consultation Questions	

Introduction

1 The Steering Group welcomes the NIACE report and publishes it in full today (24 September 2003) together with an executive summary and a consultation paper seeking comment on key issues arising from its recommendations.

2 The Steering Group intends to make recommendations for Operational Guidance on the relationship between the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) and Learning Partnerships (LPs) for 2004-05 following the next stage of consultation.

3 The Steering Group has used the NIACE recommendations to draw up 13 questions, which we believe should frame our recommendations.

4 Your comments are requested both on the overall NIACE report and on the Steering Group's summary consultation.

5 The Steering Group will meet to frame its recommendations to LSC on 18 November 2003 so responses to Joanne Bratby (joanne.bratby@lsc.gov.uk fax number 024 7682 3250 or post to Cheylesmore House, Quinton Road, Coventry CV1 2WT) by 17:00 on **Wednesday 5 November** would be gratefully received.

Background

6 The LSC is a non departmental public body with 47 local arms. It aims to present a reliably consistent strategic approach to the planning, funding and quality improvement of post 16 learning opportunities across England. Within their remit, local LSCs are obliged to sustain local partnerships to promote collaboration and maximise the contribution of learning to local regeneration – the core role of the already established network of LPs as set out by ministers following the Department for Education and Skills (DfES) review 2002.

7 In May 2003, the LSC commissioned the NIACE review into its relationship with LPs in order to inform Operational Guidance for 2004-05 because previously independent funding of LPs passes into the discretionary element of LLSC budgets from that date, but ministerial expectations of their role remain the same.

8 At its first meeting in June 2003, the steering group set the terms of reference for the review, agreeing that it would:

- look at how LPs can best support the LSC corporate objectives and targets and identify how the LP wider role can add value to the LSC corporate objectives and targets;

- identify and agree appropriate impact measures so that we can measure the value added that LPs bring in helping the LSC meet its Corporate objectives and targets;
- consider what scope there is to enhance the role of Learning Partnerships eg in relation to workforce development;
- recommend the best structural fit for LPs from 2004: there are currently 101¹ LPs. The review will consider the number of LPs and the appropriateness of this structure.²

9 The steering group received and discussed the draft report of the independent review at its second meeting on 8 September 2003. The draft was also shared with the Chair of the Learning Partnerships Network at a separate meeting. Comments from these two meetings have informed the final report. The steering group has drawn up a series of key questions based on the report's findings in relation to the original remit. These questions are the subject of this consultation but comments are also invited on the broader NIACE recommendations. The consultative responses will inform LSC operating guidance due to be issued to local LSCs by the end of the calendar year.

Steering Group Consultation Questions: relating to the NIACE Executive Summary

10 Comments are invited on the following consultation questions:

How LPs support and add value to LSC corporate objectives and targets

Q1 Do you agree that Operational Guidance to LLSCs for 2004-05 should encourage them to adopt a nationally consistent approach to contracting with their established LP(s) as a preferred provider, to deliver at the very least a basic minimum service around the core functions of:

- promoting provider collaboration;
- maximising the contribution of learning to local regeneration;

in support of the related objectives and targets in their local strategic plans and wider LSC responsibilities identified by government in the remit and grant letters?

¹ The recent changes to boundaries in Greater Manchester has now increased this number to 104.

² It was agreed following discussion that this was an unrealistic aim.

LPs' Remit, Role and Priorities

Q2 Do you agree that the activities actually to be delivered, related to the core role of LPs identified by the DfES review 2002 of:

- promoting provider collaboration;
- maximising the contribution of learning to local regeneration;

should be agreed locally, related to available resources and capacity and in the context of the roles of respective stakeholders?

Changes to the LP Network

Q3 Do you agree that where multiple LPs render the cost to a local LSC unaffordable that it should seek to broker a rationalisation of LP delivery costs within and between its LPs in order to sustain local partnership activity and that LLSCs, LPs and, possibly LSPs, might collaborate regionally to achieve this?

Impact Measures

Q4 Do you agree that LLSCs and LPs should seek to identify a nationally consistent range of impact measures for LPs in the delivery of their core role and use such a menu to agree relevant outputs and outcomes in their local agreements?

Q5 Do you have a view about what might be included?

Funding

Q6 Given that some LLSCs face an 'affordability' issue in 2004-05 once LPs become one of a number of demands on their discretionary budgets, do you agree, in order to minimise inconsistency in treatment of LPs, that Operational Guidance should be issued setting out a range of models to illustrate service delivery options and their associated costs, so that LLSCs can be seen to be negotiating fair, consistent, affordable and sustainable contracts with their LP(s)?

Q7 Do you agree that LLSCs should move towards 3 year funding agreements with their LPs based on locally agreed delivery plans with appropriate performance measures for the LSC funded element?

Q8 Do you agree that Operational Guidance for 2004-05 should avoid recommendation of minimum/maximum levels of funding for LP funding agreements but should encourage LLSCs to seek to sustain viable partnerships to deliver their core role?

Performance

Q9 Do you agree that the LSC should take over the role previously played by the DfES and Local Government offices of supporting regional and national LP networks and the website and supporting continuous professional development of LP managers?

Action on Improvement

Q10 Do you agree that Operational Guidance for 2004-05 should encourage those LLSCs which have serious concerns about the performance of an LP in their area to adopt a performance improvement strategy before taking action which will effectively withdraw support from the local partnership?

Boundaries

Q11 Do you agree that boundary issues should not be the subject of Operational Guidance but should be addressed locally as part of each LLSCs Strategic Area Review?

Policy Clarity

Q12 Do you agree that Operational Guidance 2004-05 should be based on a nationally consistent understanding that established LPs are the first choice for LLSCs in meeting their obligation to sustain local partnerships to:

- promote provider collaboration;
- maximise the input of learning to local regeneration?

Q13 Do you agree that further work should be done by the Skills and Adult Programme Board³ on taking forward the broader recommendations of the NIACE review report?

11 A pro forma for responses is provided at annex A. This should be completed and returned to Joanne Bratby (joanne.bratby@lsc.gov.uk fax number 024 7682 3250 or post to Cheylesmore House, Quinton Road, Coventry CV1 2WT) by 17:00 on Wednesday **5 November** at the latest.

³The Skills and Adult Programme Board comprises of representatives from each local LSC region, representatives from LSC National Office Directorates and representatives from the DfES to provide strategic advice and direction for all aspects of adult skills and learning.

Annex A: Responses to Consultation Questions

Learning Partnerships Review 2003

Name of institution	
Contact officer for queries	
Tel	Fax
Email	Local LSC

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Comments

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Comments

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Publication enquiries:0870 900 6800

Reference MISC/0853/03