

Date 26 October 2011
Subject Advisory Forum
Location BIS Conference Centre, London
Time 11:00-13:30

Attendees:

Kim Thorneywork (Chair)	Skills Funding Agency
Miranda Floy (Minutes)	Skills Funding Agency
Keith Smith	Skills Funding Agency
Verity Bullough	Skills Funding Agency
Sue Baldwin	YPLA
Alison Bennett	YPLA
Elisabeth Baines	YPLA
Paul Williamson	YPLA
Jess Ward	Department of Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS)
Jo Thomas	Department for Education (DfE)
Martin Doel	Association of Colleges (AoC)
Sue Rimmer	AoC
Stewart Segal	Association of Employment and Learning Providers (AELP)
Jim Chambers	AELP
David Howells	157 Group
Andrew Jones	Sixth Form Colleges Forum (SFCF)
Malcolm Trobe	Association of School and College Leaders (ASCL)
Anthony Harmer	Third Sector National Learning Alliance (TSNLA)
David Kendall	NatSpec
Bob Powell	HOLEX
Alastair Moon	Independent Academies Association (IAA)
Juliette Sargeant	Universities UK (UUK)
David Lawrence	Landex

Apologies:

Julie Nugent	Skills Funding Agency
Jane Cowell	YPLA
David Way	National Apprenticeship Service (NAS)
Susan Pember	BIS
Ruth Curry	BIS
Julian Gravatt	AoC
Marion Plant	AoC
Graham Hoyle	AELP
Paul Warner	AELP
Angela O'Donohue	157 Group

David Igoe	SFCF
Nigel Robbins	Tertiary Colleges Group (TCG)
David Hughes	NIACE
Stephen Jeffery	TSNLA
Tim Ward	TSNLA
David Grigg	ASCL
Jonathan Fawcett	ASCL
Jasbir Jhas	Local Government Association (LGA)
Philip Mind	LGA

Item 1. Welcome and introductions

- 1.1 Kim Thorneywork introduced herself as Chair for this meeting and welcomed the group.

Item 2. Minutes of previous meeting

- 2.1 The group agreed the minutes of the last meeting.
- 2.3 The action on Transport Issues was discussed. The group agreed it was still a live issue but that the Local Authority dimension was crucial, and since this was currently being discussed at Departmental level it was agreed members would raise it at a later meeting if they had concerns.
- 2.4 Kim updated the group on the Ministerial Submission that had gone up on Functional Skills in Apprenticeships – she said this debate was ongoing, but that Ministers were aware the concerns around this issue.
- 2.5 The action at 8.4 was carried:
Action: Jane Cowell and Julian Gravatt to work on some case studies and add Apprenticeships to it and bring to the next meeting

Item 3. Terms of Reference

- 3.1 The group agreed the proposed Terms of Reference with one addition: Verity suggested including a representative from the careers service on the Advisory Forum and there was general agreement that this would be desirable.

Action: Verity to identify a suitable Careers Service representative and put them in touch with Miranda

Action: Miranda to amend ToR and circulate to the group

Item 4. Simplification in the round

- 4.1 Kim introduced the Joint Paper on Simplification and explained that the two Agencies have been working closely together on similar strands of work
- 4.2 Kim explained that while there had been some simplification of the system, the Skills Funding Agency did not feel they had 'cracked it' yet. She said there was an ongoing NAO Inquiry into Reducing Bureaucracy in FE, so there was some external scrutiny here. And she explained that the Agency would be operating some very detailed case studies in Colleges in mid-late November – with the findings disseminated in early January – and that they would be extended to a small number of other providers. Kim said that Colleges were being used in the first instance as they have multiple funding streams.
- 4.3 Kim acknowledged that the Agency's communications were far too complex and that the aim was to adopt a baseline approach, to completely strip back all communications going out to the sector.
- 4.4 Sue Baldwin introduced Alison Bennett who tabled a paper detailing the YPLA work towards implementation, progress and next steps around reducing burdens and bureaucracy including on Sixth Form Colleges.
- 4.5 The group commented that link between Lord Hill and the Whole Provider View is welcome and reassuring, but there was some concern that the timings of the YPLA reporting and the SFA work on the Whole Provider View would not match up.
Sue Baldwin clarified the position, saying that the Lord Hill had been looking specifically at financial audit issues in Academies and that one area of work would feed into the other.
- 4.6 The group discussed marketing and the communication of the new ways of working to the sector. The group commented that while there does seem to be progress towards greater freedoms and flexibilities, there is a still a 'sales job' to be done to the sector as a whole. Sue and Kim confirmed that Advisory Forum representatives could share the Simplification papers with their members.
Other comments included:
- Concerns have been eased by the dual running of the two systems
 - HOLEX offered an adult provider as a willing case study when the pilots were extended beyond colleges

- There may be some lessons to be learned from the FE Comms Gateway Group which met in the past – so long as any future group did not find itself used to edit documents
 - Ofsted must not be forgotten in this process – they have a big impact on institutions and must be remembered in this context
- 4.7 Keith Smith addressed the issue of Large Employers and Training Providers. He said that the recommendations could be applied for Large Employers and that he could circulate to the group, the proposed evaluation of the Large Employer pilot. He said there was a second layer of work around SMEs – and that these, and the question of how they would navigate through the system were at the forefront of the development of the Employer Toolkit. He acknowledged that the work on SMEs was slightly behind. Keith stressed that the Agency was trying to simplify the whole FE system and that it has to actually feel different as a result.
- Comments included:
- At the moment the changes feel very imbalanced
 - Outcomes are highly dependent on size of organisation
 - The vast majority of Apprenticeships are delivered through providers and the issue of E-signatures was raised
- 4.8 Verity Bullough made the point that there is a lot of frustration being expressed via the Employer Reference Group, but that the Agency wanted to use that energy to drive the implementation work.
- 4.9 Kim Thorneywork acknowledged that 2012/13 is still an important year and time mustn't be lost; she said that the Agency was well aware of this concern.
- 4.10 The group agreed that this is as much about the culture as the changes themselves, and requested that the SFA involve other types of provider. Keith Smith said that this was a big piece of work, that the SFA was looking at all the funding rules and would stress test them all to see what the burden was on providers. He explained that there were two working groups being set up – one on funding systems and one on funding rates – with the aim being to remove as many of the burdens as possible.
- 4.11 Returning to the overarching approach, Sue Baldwin said that it has to be system wide, because what constitutes bureaucracy for an employer may be different for a provider. She said that a lot of effort is being made to make changes and that effort needed to be made in the wider provider base so that any internal burdens are addressed; the Advisory Forum has a role in pushing these changes through.

It was recognised that:

- There have been a lot of changes that have then been changed back again.
- Until there is a clean sheet approach, with auditors and Ofsted all “singing from the same hymn sheet”, it will be hard to make a fresh start therefore Ofsted should be involved
- There is optimism that the changes can happen, but as long as auditors and inspectors are involved

4.12 The group discussed the complexities around ESF and the different requirements that are still needed there. Kim said that the Agency was grappling with this and agreed it mustn't be forgotten.

Item 5. Learners with Learning Difficulties and/or Disabilities

5.1 Sue Baldwin introduced the joint paper on LLDD and said that the two Agencies had tried to view the issue from all angles and all provider types, but were interested to hear from the group what was missing from the paper. She introduced Paul Williamson who took the group through the paper highlighting the key points.

Comments included:

- Lag-learner numbers are welcome, but high cost in this instance is often very high cost and the main issue for providers is not knowing early enough to be able to make provision for such high costs
- There is a Local Authority element to this, if you are in London you are dealing with several LAs at once – the concern is that the lag-learner numbers might not be enough to cover the fee
- There is real concern about over 25s, these learners can go backwards as soon as the support stops
- The notion of choice and personalised budgets bring big opportunities and problems. By entering into a system of personalised budgets you are entering a competitive free market

5.2 Sue Baldwin said that LLDD and offender learning were the most challenging issues facing her at the moment. But she said it was important to get the narrative out and say how the YPLA will make this work. The question was how you negotiate some bureaucracy into the system to ensure these young people can get what they need.

Comments included:

- Colleges, if they are under no obligation to do it, may ditch this provision if they are under financial pressure

- Communication on this issue is vital
- The suggestion of 3 days a week prompts the question, 'are we paying the right rate?' but 5 days a week pushes all learners over the cap
- While a college principal may continue to do this out of a sense of moral duty a finance director will run in the opposite direction
- Both levers need to be pulled – ALS should be raised as well
- The lag-learner element needs to be bigger

Action: Paul Williamson to follow up on the topics discussed with individual members

Item 6. Communications

- 6.1 The group discussed the proposed Advisory Forum Forward Plan and made suggested amendments.

Action: Miranda to circulate the amended version with a definitive list of future meeting dates

- 6.2 Kim agreed that the two technical groups on funding simplification and funding rates should feed into the Advisory Forum in some way; and that this could become a standing item on future agendas.

Action: Miranda to add to future agendas

- 6.3 The group discussed the whole communications process, and agreed that while the sector doesn't need to be spoken to in the same way it was in the past, a plan was needed, with 'workshops' rather than 'briefings' suggested.

Sue Baldwin said that with both Agencies making cuts, the large briefings of the past would be impossible, but she agreed time would need to be spent making schools and colleges understand the changes. Large workshop sessions could be used; both Agencies are aware that there is a lack of consistency of understanding.

Item 7. Any other business

- 7.1 There was no other business.

Item 8. Date of next meeting

- 8.1 The next meeting is **7 December, 11:00-13:30** (with a buffet lunch to follow) in **Room 15B, Cheylesmore House, Coventry.**

Minutes

Meeting chair	Kim Thorneywork
Minutes creator	Miranda Floy
Date created	27 October 2011