Minutes

Date 29 November 2006
Subject Adult Learning Committee
Location LSC London Office, Grosvenor Gardens
Time 10:00
LSC office National Office
Publication intent Internal

Present
Frances O’Grady (Chair)
Judith Armitt
Tony Chandler
Alex Pratt
Pat McMullan
Graham Taylor

In attendance
Tim Down, DfES
Jessica Matthews, DCLG (item 1 only)
Liz Furssedonn-Wood, DWP (item 1 only)

LSC officials
Melanie Hunt
Jaine Clarke
Priya Gossain
Pam Vaughan
Jim Lewis (item 1 only)

Apologies
Alan Tuckett
Richard Atkins
Giles Clarke
Chris Humphries
Pat Passley
Sandra Burslem
Anthony Massouras
John Landeryou, ALI
Cathy Hughes, JobCentre Plus
Stephen Hillier, DfES
David Way, LSC
Jon Gamble, LSC

Item 1. Economic Development – Discussion Session
1.1 Frances O’Grady welcomed everyone to the meeting and commented that since the Committee last met, the Further Education and Training Bill had been introduced in the House of Lords which would have implications for the role of the Committee. In addition, the final report from the Leitch Review was due to be published the following week which would also
impact on the LSC. She commented that there was lots to welcome in the Bill which gave the LSC new duties to consult with learner and employers on the funding and provision of learning. Further Education institutions would also have the power to award Foundation Degrees. The Bill will also streamline and restructure the LSC removing the requirement for an Adult Learning Committee.

1.2 The Chair then explained that the meeting would be run a little differently this time. After a series of inputs on economic development looking at the Thames Gateway as a case study, members would be asked ‘What are the implications for economic development in the LSC?’ Judith Armitt, the Committee lead for the Economic Development session who has recently been appointed Chief Executive of Thames Gateway, opened the session with a presentation.

1.3 Judith Armitt began her presentation by welcoming the opportunity to discuss economic development and commented that she was pleased that it was a priority for the LSC. Her presentation set out the social challenge that exists in the Thames Gateway and how vital it was to improve the life chances of people in the region and enable them to access the new jobs that the development of the area will bring. There were a number of economic opportunities to be grasped including Canary Wharf, which was the fastest growing business location in the UK, and the Channel Tunnel Rail Link which would be up and running next year. The Olympics to be held in 2012 and WorldSkills in 2011 were also taking place in the Gateway.

1.4 Judith commented that skills was the biggest problem facing the Gateway where 19% of those of working age in the area have no qualifications and 50% of children in the London area of Gateway are from workless households. However there were positive developments to report including the establishment of the Thames Gateway School of Urban Renaissance in the area. WorldSkills also provides an opportunity to celebrate vocational learning like never before. Judith ended her presentation with her vision for the Thames Gateway by 2016.

1.5 Jim Lewis, LSC Economic Development Director – Thames Gateway, then spoke about the LSC investment in the Thames Gateway which included £10 million in 25 CoVEs over four years and plans for capital spend of £600 million by 2010. The LSC had also provided a considerable amount of intelligence for use by institutions as well as individuals. It was also a key partner in the Thames Gateway Further and Higher Education Action Group which is chaired by Bill Rammell and membership from partners across the area.

1.6 Jim ended his presentation with some of the next steps to be taken, including the extension of Train to Gain at Level 2 and 3, guarantee of assured progression to degree level, improved IAG and the further expansion of FE and HE.

1.7 Liz Fursessedon-Wood, Senior Policy Manager at the Department of Work and Pensions, then made a presentation about City Strategies which aims to tackle worklessness in disadvantaged communities, many of which are
in major towns and cities. By aligning efforts and tailoring services to tackle disadvantage through a partnership approach, it is hoped that better support can be provided to help jobless people find and progress in work.

1.8 Fifteen pathfinders were announced in July to test this approach and they will be developing their plans between now and the end of 2006. Seedcorn funding of £5 million has been provided to support this partnership approach, and reward payments for improved outcomes will be available.

1.9 Jessica Matthews, Deputy Director – Cities and Urban Policy Division at the Department for Communities and Local Government ended the series of presentations by talking about City Regions. There is evidence that economies function at a city region level which goes beyond local authority boundaries and are similar to travel to work areas.

1.10 The State of the Cities report set out a long term vision including a “New Deal for Cities” based on an agreement between government and each city on challenges, targets and funding for areas, including skills and employment.

1.11 The identified city regions submitted business cases to Ministers, which the LSC was involved in, from which two strong messages came through—transport and skills. Employment and skills boards are being established in each of the city regions to match provision with employer needs. There are discussions to see how these fit with the Regional Skills Partnerships, and the forthcoming Treasury sub-national review of economic development and regeneration which reports ahead of the Comprehensive Spending Review in 2007, will also impact on the city regions debate.

1.12 Before opening up for discussion, the Chair asked Pam Vaughan, LSC Director – Economic Development, to comment on the national LSC perspective. The recent Annual Statement of Priorities features strong statements on economic development and the LSC wants to drive forward the agenda nationally in the development of an integrated skills and employment system.

1.13 Pam circulated a draft paper to Committee members which set out early proposals for a “Skills for Jobs” programme for individuals and employers. This would be employment led programme based on local need. An initial £100 million was being sought for this; however additional investment would be attracted from other sources such as European Social Fund and the Neighbourhood Renewal Fund. Pam explained that she wanted to use the opportunity to try out the idea with Committee members and get their views.

1.14 The Chair then asked for comments from Committee members on the presentations they had heard, focusing in particular on ‘what the LSC needed to do differently to support economic development’. In discussion the following comments were made:
• Whether the new jobs created in the Thames Gateway would go to local people and the challenge in changing the nature of these jobs to ensure they were sustainable and accessible.

• The importance of knowing the issues and obstacles for workless households and the need to do take a multi-agency approach to engage these communities.

• Ways to measure the impact made in the Thames Gateway and the need to ensure a common and shared methodology amongst agencies.

• What should be the contribution of each structural tier to economic development and what added value can each tier bring.

• The ambition of the Government's for more economic convergence between the north and the south. A strategic issue for the LSC is what more can be done to support greater convergence between regions.

• Skills issues impact on deprivation, worklessness and other factors, however good governance should determine outcomes.

• There appears to be lots of layers of bureaucracy, but need to get information direct to learners to make a difference.

• There is a policy conflict between national targets and making a difference to the lives of local people. Targeting can make a difference.

• Seem to be drifting towards complexity. Need to crack problems with infrastructure using Thames Gateway as a test-bed.

• The LSC is good at responding to company closures, however need do more to understand companies’ strategies around relocation and expansion.

• Public accountability, especially learner accountability, should be built into local strategies to prevent fragmentation.

• Should focus resources on where effective results are already demonstrated rather than start up a new national initiative. Give partnerships the freedom to operate differently if there is an appetite to develop a local solution.

• The LSC is well placed to be involved in the local agenda so need to engage locally and promote flexible provision.

• There are lots of good things are going on locally but these are short-term, small pilots. Should build incrementally on these.

1.15 As Committee lead on the discussion, Judith Armitt ended the item by commenting that there had been lots of candour and honesty in the debate. A core question in the discussions had been about what the LSC could do differently. Her view on this was to find ways to target resources and make an impact by working with others and going beyond institutional structures.

1.16 The Chair thanked all of the speakers for their presentations and members for their contribution to the discussion.
Item 2. Learning and Skills Report

2.1 Jaine Clarke presented the Skills Group aspects of the paper by highlighting some of the key areas of progress:

- **Train to Gain** was progressing well. Currently 56% of employers are ‘hard to reach’ and employer satisfaction with the brokerage service is high. Good work was taking place with partners on the development of protocols and putting them into practice. However there were some process and system issues to be addressed.

- The launch of the **National Skills Academies** (NSAs) network took place in October with business plans being approved for three of the first round proposals. A further four expressions of interest had been approved from the second round and the prospectus for the third round is being developed.

2.2 Melanie Hunt then presented highlights from the Learning Group part of the report:

- Work was continuing on the **Vocational Qualification Reform** programme and it was anticipated that the first phase of reformed Sector Qualification Strategies will come on stream by 2008. However it was a complex programme, especially given that it has a four country approach.

- **Foundation Learning Tier** trial sites have now been confirmed and work is continuing to ensure that it offers purposeful progression pathways for young people and adults.

- A recent OFSTED report on the **Offender Learning and Skills Service** commented positively on the shift in the quality of provision since the LSC had taken on responsibility for the programme.

- An initial consultation had taken place on the new **Framework for Excellence** and policy issues were now being discussed. This would be a tool to help move the FE system towards self regulation and allow more flexibility for colleges.

2.3 Frances O’Grady commented on the first meeting of the Skills Task Group, a sub-group of the Public Services Forum, which was mentioned in the report. This had been a good first meeting and she thanked the LSC for their contribution of data. The next step was to work on a joint vision and priorities where the group can make a measurable impact. Hopefully the forthcoming Leitch report will help in this and push it forward.

2.4 In response to questions from the Committee, Jaine made the following comments:

- Progress was being made on Train to Gain in the public sector and making brokerage fit for purpose.

- Work was ongoing to ensure that there was union involvement in NSAs in particular in the governance arrangements. The LSC was keeping a close eye on this.
- Ministers want to actively encourage applications for NSAs from the public sector and the LSC could offer support by providing a special session for interested public sector employers.
- There is evidence from employers that CoVEs are valued and are effective in engaging employers. There is a future for CoVEs as part of the ‘hub and spoke’ model with NSAs, however each sector offers a different model and all work differently.

2.5 The following actions were agreed:
- Further information to be provided on NSA business plans, including the public and private sector funds and the number of learners. **Action: Jaine Clarke**
- Circulate the Skills for Business Phase 3 Evaluation Report and the National Employer Skills Survey. **Action: Jaine Clarke**

**Item 3. Performance Report**

3.1 Jaine Clarke presented the Performance Report which updated the Committee on progress against key targets relating to adults. Highlights from the report were:
- A large increase in the number of Apprenticeships completed, as well as significant increases in success rates. However there had been a recent drop in demand for Apprenticeships by young people which was being investigated. Contributory factors to this could be the wider take up of Education Maintenance Allowances or expansion of the Entry to Employment programme. Also the number of young people in the Train to Gain programme appeared to be higher than those in the Employer Training Pilots.
- Good progress was being made towards the Skills for Life PSA target for 2010 and the 2007 milestone. However policy changes were being introduced and numeracy provision was under review. The focus would also now move to clients who may have more complex needs and would require additional support.
- The numbers of adults qualified to NVQ level 2 is the highest ever recorded total. The 2006 milestone has been met early, however the 2010 target will be challenging.
- On adult participation a shift in activity from other programmes to supporting full first level 2s, has meant a reduction in the overall number of learners.

3.2 In response to questions from the Committee Jaine made the following comments:
- Work was taking place to explain the recent drop in take-up of Apprenticeships. This would consider a number of possible reasons, including pay or the need to complete a full framework.
• The ESOL funding changes would take place in 2007/08 academic year and the time would be used to understand the implications on policy and how the changes could be embedded.
• Work was taking place with DfES on the Race Impact Assessment on the ESOL funding changes. Preliminary work had taken place and now detailed work would take place on a sample of colleges.
• Discussions on Train to Gain and ESOL funding were still taking place.
• The cost of each route to achieve a first full Level 2 varies, as each programme has a different client group with different needs.

3.3 Further information to be provided on the cost of the various routes to achieve a first full Level 2.

**Action:** Jaine Clarke

3.4 Tim Down commented that he thought there was an error in the table of figures at paragraph 17 of the Performance Report. The 2007-08 Work Based Learning 19+ figure should be £273,580k and not £245,700k. This would impact on the grand total for planned expenditure which then should be £11,171,397k and not £11,137,647k as stated. These figures would be checked with the paper’s author.

**Action:** Priya Gossain

**Item 4. Minutes and Matters Arising**

4.1 The minutes of the last meeting were agreed as an accurate record.
4.2 Frances O’Grady commented that note on Train to Gain (as per paragraph 2.3) would be circulated by email following the meeting.

**Item 5. Any Other Business**

5.1 The Chair drew members’ attention to the two papers for note that had been circulated with the papers for the meeting. These were:
• A briefing on the recent Local Government White Paper; and
• Notes from the Committee’s awayday held on 12 October.
5.2 Copies of a draft forward plan were circulated at the meeting and members were asked to pass any comments to Priya Gossain. The document was work in progress and would be reviewed following the publication of the final report from the Leitch Review.
5.3 Tim Down commented that early next year, the DfES and LSC would be consulting on an Equalities Impact Assessment for the Skills Strategy which was likely to raise some big issues for discussion.
5.4 The Chair commented that she wanted to take stock of the Committee’s work and consider what had gone well and what could have been done better. This self-evaluation would then be fed into the new national arrangements to ensure the Committee had a useful legacy. Committee members agreed to hold this session after the next meeting which would be extended to allow sufficient time for a discussion.
5.5 Frances O’Grady commented that this would have been Sandra Burslem’s last meeting as a member of the Adult Learning Committee, however she had been unable to attend as her daughter had been taken ill. The Chair agreed to pass on the Committee’s good wishes to Sandra and to thank her for her considerable contribution to the work of the Committee over the last six years.

Meeting chair        Frances O’Grady
Minute taker         Priya Gossain
Date created         29 November 2006
Document ref.        \lsc.local\Sites$\CVH\Site\Organisational Data\Skills Group\Skills Strategy Unit\Adult Learning Committee\Meetings\2006\Nov06\nat-adultlearningcommittee-minutes-29nov2006.doc