Minutes

Date 20 June 2007
Subject Special External Advisory Group
Location BW Mostyn Hotel London
Time 11:00
LSC office National Office
Publication intent Public

Present
Andrew Jones
David Lawrence
Donald Rae
Elaine McMahon
Geoff Hall
Helen Sexton
John Roe
Malcolm Trobe
Steve Gray
Sue Rimmer
Tim Ward
Bob Powell
Graham Hoyle
Stewart Segal
Sue Meyer
David Hughes
Judi Douglas
Rebecca Loveday

In attendance Stephen Marston

Apologies Apologies have been received from:
Mark Haysom
Di Dale
Nick Lewis
Marion Plant
Minutes

Julian Gravatt
Lindsey Wharmby
Verity Bullough

Item 1. Welcome and introductions
1.1 David Hughes welcomed everyone to the meeting. Introductions were made.

Item 2. Delivering World Class Skills: A Demand-Led System for the Future
2.1 Stephen Marston, Director General Life Long Learning and Skills, gave a presentation to members on progress against targets and the challenges ahead for the sector, including the implementation of Leitch and Self Regulation. He asked members to note that any outcome to imminent ministerial changes may impact on the proposals to be discussed at this meeting. The presentation stimulated a good series of questions, views and discussion:

2.2 The operational detail supporting the integration of the Department for Work and Pensions and Jobcentre Plus was to be finalised. However, a review of Information Advice and Guidance was agreed to enable a more consistent assessment of need and follow-on training for Jobcentre Plus customers.

2.3 Although some HE programmes contained a work-based element, HEFCE had yet to allocate funding in support of training in the workplace. A funding model was required in HE that supported work-based delivery.

2.4 The attainment of a first full Level 2 qualification remained a target, with the Foundation Learning Tier designed to enable progression. It was noted that the classification of a full Level 2 prevented provider responsiveness where appropriate programmes were not identified as priority provision. The Qualifications and Curriculum Reform programme would assist in this in the longer term.

Action: To investigate the classification of Full Level 2 provision to ensure it enables provider responsiveness to employer needs (SM)

2.5 Although it was recognised that some employees held a full Level 2 that was inappropriate for their current employment, funding was not unlimited and therefore would be prioritised towards the seven million people who did not have a first full Level 2. However, it was noted Train to Gain brokers were raising employer expectations to believe all their training needs would be met. This damaged marketing plans and risked employer willingness to contribute to the cost of those programmes where their contribution was required.

2.6 Employers were reporting high satisfaction levels with brokers, who were utilising a large number of mechanisms to meet employer needs. However, there was not a strong flow of referrals to the FE sector, perhaps because of
the priority of brokers to attract the hardest to reach into learning. It was important to also ensure the needs of those closer to the learning market were met.

2.7 It was highly probable that the CSR 08/09 would continue to identify priorities such as full Level 2 and 3 and Skills for Life and that it would also protect funding for LLDD, ESOL and PCDL, recognising the importance of these areas.

2.8 There had been much success through Train to Gain but the ability of the sector to engage with the hard to reach through new innovation should not be forgotten. This should be supported by a clear progression pathway strategy, such as the Foundation Learning Tier once it was implemented.

2.9 Research within the FE Reform Agenda had been unable to identify any pattern or correlation between centrally merged institutions, including devolved administration and capital investment, and improved results. It was therefore the decision of DfES to allow individual provider freedom to enter into mergers or partnerships where these best met the interests of the institution. Further research was required to gain understanding of the impact on the market where there had been a large growth in individual institutions.

2.10 It was the role of the Commission for Employment and Skills to ensure a credible voice was established that captured social and economic interests within a demand led system.

2.11 Concern was raised that the level of bureaucracy and instability would be increased within a Demand led System. It was noted however that over-specified planning prevented responsiveness to local demand.

2.12 Local progression targets and partnerships would give local, collective accountability for young people. ASCL’s help was required in developing an incentive structure for school engagement. Although intervention in schools who failed to enter into those partnerships would not take place, a sense of responsibility for an institution’s own future was very important and led to great gains for the sector.

2.13 The Skills Campaign should also consider Personal and Community Learning. This was not a debate for greater public funding but the promotion of the benefits of undertaking this type of provision.

2.14 The reform of Information Advice and Guidance would consider the links with Connexions, strengthening the service for young people in a local area.

2.15 It should not be assumed all providers were commercially driven. The Third Sector (VCS) should be consulted with to ensure the impact of the proposals within the Demand led System were understood and their important contribution was not negatively affected.