LSC’s Research and Evaluation Programme

Date of issue 30 January 2008
Audience Council
LSC office Office
Publication intent Internal
Agenda item 14
Internal paper ref LSC 21/2008

Background and introduction
1 The transfer of research to Strategy and Communications, coupled with the changes enabled by Theme 7 have significantly enhanced the profile and impact of LSC research. This reflects the level of internal engagement in and use of research and evaluation and the greater dissemination and communication of LSC research externally.

Purpose
2 This paper provides the Council with an update of key achievements and findings from our national research and evaluation programme, and briefly sets out plans for 2008/09.

Recommendation
3 The Council are asked to note the contents of the paper and offer any comments on the plan. We would also welcomes any offers from members who would like to sponsor any of the projects, or advise on scope and development.

Key Achievements
Greater engagement with partners
4 We have built excellent working relationships with the Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills (DIUS) research colleagues. We regularly share and comment on each others specifications, to ensure real complementarity, and often manage projects jointly. With two small teams this has increased our effectiveness.

5 We have developed relationships with other government departments, think tanks and the Sector Skills Development Agency (SSDA). For example, we
are overseeing the production of the Working Futures report, on behalf of SSDA, as they go through a period of organisational change. This is a key piece of research, used by many working in the skills and employment sector, and it was vital the work continued. The LSC will look after this research until the Employment and Skills Commission is in a position to take it forward.

Meeting the needs of regions and national teams

6 The research and evaluation team has positioned itself at the heart of the business, offering a service to both national and regional teams. We aim to provide high quality intelligence that informs national thought leadership, underpins the improvement of performance and ensures good practice is and ‘learning’ is disseminated across regions.

7 To ensure we have the best set of research contractors to call upon, we have established a new framework contract. Regional teams and national policy teams were involved with the development of this and the appraisal of potential contractors to ensure the framework meets the needs of the whole organisation.

Positioning the LSC as a source of expertise conferences

8 LSC research is increasingly used to support the work of the Chair and Chief Executive, for example in speeches and briefings and in contributing evidence to wider debates such as Public Accounts Committees, Select Committees etc.

9 We have increasingly ‘launched’ and/or shared research at expert seminars and roundtables. Similarly, we have greatly enhanced the way in which communicate research across stakeholders and the media to reflect our growing confidence and expertise. We have been particularly successful in increasing our profile and reputation with the academic and think tank community.

10 Over the last eighteen months we have developed significant relationships with people such as the Institute of Public Policy Research (IPPR), DEMOS, New Local Government Network (NLGN) and Social Market Foundation (SMF). This has enabled us to develop more horizon scanning and topical research – for example into impact of migration, poverty in work etc.

11 Increasingly, our research is used and quoted by others. The most frequently utilised is the National Employers Skills Survey (NESS). Similarly, the research we commissioned into the ‘Expansion of Apprenticeships’ became a key source of evidence for the Apprenticeship Review. Many of the findings were used as evidence for the recommendations made in the development of the National Apprenticeship Service.

12 We are also an active partner in the Teaching and Learning Research Programme, led by the University of Cardiff, which enables us to link with academic research and benefit from the most effective ways of learning at work.

Hosting our own debates
• As part of the Skills in England 2007 project we hosted a number of themed public policy seminars which aimed to bring together experts from academia and the policy community to review and debate topics in relation to employment, skills and training. Topics included Migration, and Skills and Employment

Rapid reviews of evidence to support policy debate
13 We have developed a responsive research service which is able to quickly respond to ‘hot’ policy items – undertaking rapid reviews of evidence etc to inform new and emerging policy. This has included work on skills for jobs, collaboration and mergers, migration.

Newsletter and web site
14 We have launched an on-line newsletter featuring our and other research. There are over 8,000 subscribers including some as far away as Australia. We publish all research and evaluation we carry out on our revamped micro site http://research.lsc.gov.uk/

A published research plan
15 Last year we published our first annual research and evaluation plan setting out our ambitions for the forthcoming year. Examples of recent research and evaluation projects published last year are listed below:

**Impact of Learning on Employability - Published: 1 February 2008**
A large survey of the impact and benefits of general learning in FE on:

• The economic status of workless individuals – their progression into work and off benefits
• The personal impact of learning – in terms of improving skills and increasing confidence.
• 10,000 learners were interviewed by telephone from June to August 2007. They had all undertaken an FE course which completed in 2005-06, and all were eligible for fee remission due to receipt of workless benefits. 10% of the sample were working less than 16 hours a week when their course started, and all were aged between 20 and 55.
• The key findings were that nearly four in ten (38%) of learners who were claiming workless benefits at the start of their FE course have worked since finishing their learning and one in three learners has moved into work and are no longer claiming workless benefits.

**Pilot Study of Learners in Offender Institutions - Published: 31 January 2008**
• A pilot study which extended the National Learner Satisfaction Survey (NLSS) to include learners in public prisons, and gathered information on these learners’ perceptions of their learning.
• The pilot involved 18 public prisons and Young Offender Institutes across three regions. The report shows that the majority of learners (over 80 per cent) are satisfied with their overall learning experience and the quality of their teaching and feel their course or training is meeting their needs. The
most common reasons why these learners choose courses or training is to gain a qualification, advance skills and knowledge and help with finding a job on release.

**Education Maintenance Allowance Works - Published: January 2008**

- Two recent reports show that the Education Maintenance Allowance (EMA), has succeeded in increasing the number of young people staying on in learning after 16, and the number of learners achieving qualifications at 19.
- The research showed that in its first year of national rollout, EMA caused an additional 18,500 young people to participate in further education, who would not have done so without the financial support and incentive. Analysis at national level also showed that EMA has had a positive impact on the retention, achievement and success rates of certain groups of learners, for example those from minority ethnic groups, and those with a background of high deprivation.
- The second report showed that learners in receipt of EMA were more likely to achieve full Level 2 by age 19, with specific improvement highlighted among ethnic minority groups. Receipt of EMA also impacted significantly on learners’ achievement of full Level 3 (two A levels grade A-E or equivalent).

**The Supply and Demand for Skills within Sectors - Published: 8 August 2007**

The Research team has undertaken desk-based analysis of the supply and demand for skills in each sector, to help identify:

- Which sectors currently have a relatively low level of skills, but experience high levels of demand from employers in the sector for improving the skills base of their workforce? These sectors should be the focus of efforts to increase the number of qualified employees.
- Which sectors currently have a highly qualified workforce, and actually require more skilled employees? These sectors should be the focus of efforts to deliver an increased number of highly qualified employees.

**Expanding Apprenticeship Research**

- 74 per cent of employers who do not have apprentices do not recruit anyone aged 16-18 years old and half do not recruit anyone under the age of 25. Employers claim much of this is down to the attitude of young workers rather than their skills.
- The unemployment level for learners who have completed an Apprenticeship is 9 per cent. The unemployment figure for under 25s is 14.2%. Equivalent figures for Advanced Apprenticeships are 3 per cent.
Understanding Large Employers

- Overall, qualifications were perceived as a good proxy for the skills required from the largest occupational group (60 per cent of employers agreed, while 17 per cent disagreed).
- However, there was a clear distinction between occupations usually requiring Level 4 qualifications (81 per cent) and those which usually required Level 2 qualifications or below (55 per cent). The skills less well picked-up by qualifications were thought to be generic skills such as communication and teamwork.
- Nearly half of the employers (45 per cent) prioritised motivation and/or a good attitude among applicants to their largest occupational group.
- However, this was much more likely among those whose main occupational group usually required Level 2 qualifications or below (56 per cent) compared with those whose main occupational group tended to be at Level 4 (20 per cent).
- Thirty-nine per cent of employers whose main occupational group tended to require Level 4 qualifications prioritised specific/technical skills among applicants, compared with just eight per cent of those whose main occupational group was at Level 2 or below.

National Learner Satisfaction Survey

- The findings show that the overall satisfaction levels for further education (FE) and work based learning (WBL) continue to be high and consistent with the previous year’s figures. There has been a slight drop in personal and community development learning (PCDL) levels although there is still a high level of satisfaction.

Forthcoming Research

Understanding Choice and the Empowered Learner

- Build a map of the decision making journey, understand how people gather information, look at extent of choice, understand the role of others in decision making, the influence of marketing in decision making

Evaluation of the Impact of Sector Skills Agreements

- Looking at the impact of SSAs on what is being delivered by providers and how this flows through the planning process

World Class Comparisons

- Looks at the experiences in other countries of how increased participation has been achieved for 16-18 year olds – looks at Austria, California, New South Wales, Czech republic, Sweden
Train to Gain Evaluations

- Learner and employer evaluations looking at experience and satisfaction

16 The draft plan for 2008-09 is appended to this paper for information. We would welcome any comments or suggestions that Council may have on the plan.

Clearance

17 This paper has been cleared by Rob Wye, National Director for Strategy, Communications and Learning