The New Standard launch and CoVE transition

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Background and introduction

1. The 2006 FE Reform White Paper called for the development of “a new standard to strengthen and replace the current Centre of Vocations Excellence (CoVE) standard……….and to build upon the Quality Mark proposals”

2. The Leitch report in December 2006 also recognised and endorsed the need for the development of a new standard to highlight employer responsive FE providers.

3. The resulting standard has been designed to highlight those providers who offer good responsiveness to employers (part A) and who have a quality tested vocational specialism (part B). Built to meet employers own specifications, (from a 500 employer plus, consultation) it has now been successfully and comprehensively tested with over 65 providers of different types, receiving significant positive feedback from these providers and from other stakeholders.

The new standard will:

- Set a clear standard, endorsed by employers, for providers who deliver workforce training and development solutions to employers
- Re-accredit, refresh and improve the CoVE network
- Increase employer trust and investment in FE, by presenting them with a credible mark of customer service, (one that they have shaped themselves)
- Support the implementation of Train to Gain – ensuring that providers offer an holistic skills service to employers rather than sell individual products
- Simplify the quality market in FE by superseding and replacing several regional and sectoral standards
- Act as the quality standard for identifying the delivery partners of future specialised networks, building capacity and widening the provider marketplace
- Support increased competition and choice in a demand led FE system, by recognising both public and private providers who are able to deliver workforce development solutions to employers

During December 2006 and January 2007 regional workshops were held, allowing 200 LSC staff and over 200 FE providers the chance to discuss and comment upon the standard. Following these workshops and feedback from the testing process the standard has been refined has now been finalised.
4 The New Standard will align with the Framework for Excellence, combing to form a complementary and comprehensive quality framework.

**Purpose**

5 The LSC national council are asked to;
   - Note the new standard roll-out plans
   - Comment on any issues that they foresee arising

**Roll out and CoVE transition**

6 Progress thus far had been governed by a steering group comprising of relevant stakeholders (CBI, DfES, SSDA, LSC, SBC, QIA,) and operational issues have been decided by a working group at which all regions are represented.

**Branding and ownership**

- The new standard will have an official title for launch, (this is currently being researched with employers and the sector).
- New Standard ownership will eventually pass from the LSC to an employer credible third party, to be decided by open and competitive tender

Roll Out

**Recommendation 1 Phased roll-out of the new standard.**

7 Phase 1, May 2007; CoVEs whose status has expired, and those involved in testing will be invited to apply for the standard, other providers will be able to apply but will not be courted until phase 2.

8 Phase 2, a full public launch of the standard under its new ownership to take place in either November 07 or April 2008, dependant on the roll out of the new standard.

**Recommendation 2 Phased closure of the CoVE programme**

9 CoVE providers, whose status has expired, (155 of 358 in May 2007) to be given 14 months to achieve the new standard. Achieving the new standard will mean substituting their CoVE badge with the new standard. A provider will not be able to hold both; otherwise confusion will be created among employers and learners.

10 CoVEs from later rounds will be given twelve months’ grace from the end of their existing status to achieve the New Standard (with 31 December 2007 the earliest date this can take place).

11 Thus there will be no CoVEs, as currently exist by July 2010.

12 The number of new standard accredited providers will have exceeded the number of CoVEs by 2010. These providers will form the LSC’s core delivery network for employer responsive activity.

13 In addition, National Skills Academies will use the New Standard as the benchmark for its provider partners.
Financial implications
14 The new standard will be run as a self financing model by its long term owners, with providers paying an accreditation fee. The LSC may pay the fees of CoVEs who are out of CoVE status making their first applications; the costs of this are currently being calculated.

Legal implications
15 All contractual commitments made through the CoVE programme will be honoured by the LSC.

Communications
16 A detailed internal, and external communication plan will support the roll out of the New Standard.
17 After being approved by the FE Systems Board, this paper will pass to DfES regulatory bodies and the national LSC council.
18 A submission will also be sent to Ministers for clearance.
19 All providers, including those involved in the CoVE programme will receive a letter informing them of the changes as soon as they are confirmed.