For information

Leading learning and skills

LSC Delivery Report

September 2008

LSC Management Group Report to Council

Agenda Item 13
Paper LSC 51/2008

Of interest to everyone involved in improving skills and learning opportunities across England
Introduction

This report provides National Council with an update on key strategic priorities and the development and implementation of policies and strategies across the LSC. In particular, the report focuses on strategic delivery issues, including Machinery of Government developments and areas of risk.

SECTION 1: MACHINERY OF GOVERNMENT

General

- The position on the Machinery of Government transition is changing rapidly all the time. Reports to Council will be provided on the latest known position.

- The public consultation for the Draft Legislative Programme for 2008/09, which included a proposed Education and Skills Bill, ended on 6 August 2008. The anticipated Education and Skills Bill includes provisions for the establishment of the Young People’s Learning Agency (YPLA) and the Skills Funding Agency (SFA). Consultation responses will be considered by Government and a summary will be published in the autumn ahead of the Queens Speech on 3rd December 2008.

- The location of the national offices of the Skills Funding Agency (SFA) and Young People’s Learning Agency (YPLA) has now been announced and both will be based in Coventry. Urgent resolution is being sought about regional/local locations, although it is expected that YPLA will have regional centres.

Cross-cutting functions

- Good progress has been made with DIUS on reviewing core operating functions (performance management, accreditation, commissioning, funding and settlement and information management) to identify how they currently work and what the future design principles might be for both 2010 and 2015. In addition, various options have been identified for delivery and governance for each function. Work is now underway with DCSF to determine their views on what could be shared for both core and corporate functions. The cross-cutting strand has included working closely with colleagues in HR and communications, performance management of School Sixth Forms and Sixth Form Colleges will be the responsibility of local authorities.

Young People’s Learning Agency

- The LSC has been working closely with the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) design team and has provided information on the current 14-19 functions within the LSC, the current headcount in the LSC focused on 14-19 (which was validated by Audit), the current processes within the LSC and the current business cycle.

- The current focus of activity is on preparing the detail for legislation and it appears that the YPLA will have a national board of non executives and the power to establish committees, including if it wishes, regional committees.

- A significant amount of effort has been devoted to informing the design of the planning and commissioning process for the new arrangements. There have been several workshops and exchanges including one devoted to the particular aspect of apprenticeship places for young people. It appears that funding for apprenticeships for young people will flow through the YPLA to the NAS and then the NAS will procure places from providers on behalf of Local Authorities (LAs). A number of issues were identified that will require further consideration, however, it was clear that the YPLA and NAS will work closely together, and that in all likelihood the NAS will work with LAs at sub-regional and regional level to understand LAs commissioning needs and to ensure that collectively LA plans meet the ambitions of World Class Apprenticeships.
Skills Funding Agency

- Intensive joint work between the LSC and the Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills (DIUS) has been taking place on the SFA business/delivery models, which are being progressed through the Post-19 Project Board, and joint Programme Board. The next step is to determine the structures and functions of the SFA, in preparation for draft implementation plans in early autumn, and DIUS are considering different options. In addition, the LSC has worked with consultants from Hedra to develop customer journeys for different types of employer and individuals; Hedra’s final report is due at the end of August 2008.

SECTION 2: HIGHLIGHTS

Business Cycle

- The LSC business cycle for the 2009/10 academic year continues to be developed in line with the feedback received from stakeholders, Departments and representatives from the FE sector. The principle of having one process for all 16-18 allocations is agreed and accepted and we are now working with regions on how this will be achieved. recommended allocations dates have been agreed with both Departments and are now with Ministers for decision

- The impact of any delay to the publication of the Statement of Priorities is being considered through a scenario planning process. This means that the delivery dates for some of the outputs in the business cycle will need to change if the publication of the Statement of Priorities is delayed.

Quality Assurance

- The LSC has commissioned a longitudinal evaluation of the policy set out in Identifying and Managing Underperformance. The evaluation will set out how the LSC is on target to have eliminated inadequate or unsatisfactory provision (or to be actively tackling it) by 2008. The evaluation will include detail on the systemic changes in the sector driven by the policy.

- The LSC’s Statutory Intervention Policy, and the accompanying consultation analysis and Equality Impact Assessment will now be published in October (once it has been laid before Parliament). The powers cannot be used by either the LSC or the Secretary of State in the meantime.

Labour Force Survey (LFS)

- Figures from the LFS survey brief for quarter 2, 2008 show that, over the past 12 months since quarter 2, 2007, there have been significant increases in the proportion of working age adults (19-59/64) qualified to level 2 and above and also to level 3 and above. Increases in attainment at level 4 and above have been much smaller.

  o In Quarter 2 2008, the proportion of adults in England qualified to at least NQF level 2 was 70.6 per cent, this represents a statistically significant increase in the proportion of adults qualified to level 2 or above over the past 12 months (0.8 percentage points since Quarter 2 2007).

  o In Quarter 2 2008, the proportion of adults in England qualified to at least NQF level 3 was 50.3 per cent, which is a significant increase of 0.7 percentage points since Quarter 2 2007.

  o In Quarter 2 2008, the proportion of adults in England qualified to at least NQF level 4 was 30.2 per cent. There has still been a slight increase of 0.1 percentage points in the proportion at level 4 and above over the past 12 months since Quarter 2 2007.
SECTION 3: UPDATE ON STRATEGY AND DELIVERY

Communications

- **FE reputation and capital:** the FE Reputation group next meets on 2nd September to agree a communications plan for the year ahead. This will include work at the Association of Colleges (AoC) conference and a strong involvement in Colleges Week (10 – 14 Nov). The FE Capital (Building Colleges for the Future campaign) has been approved by Bill Rammell and will kick off in September – running through till March.

- **Sponsorship and events:** a weekly email has been set up to update senior members of LSC staff on the events, conferences and speeches involving the LSC. We are endeavouring to minimise our sponsorship spend while maximising speaking opportunities. This is working well however there are still a few key events we will sponsor including the CBI Education Summit (18th Sept) and the AoC Annual Conference (18-20 Nov). As well as a wide number of speaking engagements we are also taking a role in the DIUS expo (16th Sept) by holding a seminar on the National Vacancy Matching Service (NVMS) and hosting a stand displaying a range of information on LSC products and services.

Framework for Excellence (FfE)

- Framework for Excellence is now entering its implementation phase with version 1 roll out to FE Colleges and work-based learning providers for the start of this academic year. A second phase of the pilot activity will commence in September 2008 focussing on providers which will be included in the Framework from summer 2009 for the first time, and a small number of additional indicators required to ‘round out’ the Framework. Framework plans gained approval at the June meeting of the Information Board and were presented to the Bureaucracy Reduction Group on 17th July

- The Framework pilot reported that providers recognised both the willingness of the LSC to make changes in light of the experience of the pilot, and that there was no significant increase in bureaucracy. Costs and burdens on providers continue to be minimised by using existing data and systems wherever possible in line with Managing Information across Partners principles. The only additional requirement is for providers to conduct learner and employer surveys using a common methodology. We recognise that this could be seen as some to be an additional burden and are working closely with version 1 providers to minimise this.

- Discussions are underway with stakeholders about proposals to develop a unified framework to apply to 16-19 and adult providers, including school sixth forms, based on Framework for Excellence. The detailed development work will be taken forward by LSC/DIUS and DCSF. A reference group of Head/Deputy Teachers, Local Authorities and Sector Bodies will be invited to steer this work.

Equality & Diversity

- **Addressing inequalities in apprenticeships:** the LSC and DIUS Ministerial Delivery Unit are jointly undertaking a review of further ways to promote equality in apprenticeships. The review is a short, intensive piece of work which will report to the Minister for Skills in September 2008. It includes: analysis of data, evidence and literature; interviews with key stakeholders and focus groups with learners on ‘atypical’ learning paths.

- **Equality Impact Assessment:** the LSC is making good progress in meeting the commitment in the Single Equality Scheme to undertake initial screenings of all policies for their potential impact on equality and full assessments, including consultation and involvement of affected groups, where a potential impact is identified. The Statement of Priorities will include a full update of our progress towards this commitment.

- **Regional Councils:** the LSC is ensuring that Regional Councils are representative of their communities and able to advise the LSC effectively on equality and diversity issues: All Councils apart from two (South East and North East) have met the target for 10% black and minority ethnic membership. However, we have so far been less successful in meeting our aspirations for representation by gender and disability. Each Regional Council will be appointing an equality and
diversity champion and Chairs will attend a diversity training programme. All regional and national Councils have recruited (or are recruiting) a learner representative.

**Young People’s Learning and Skills**

- An update on this summer’s GCSE and A-level results is provided at the back of the report.

**Prime Minister’s Delivery Unit (PMDU) review of NEET**

- During late May and June, the Prime Minister’s Delivery Unit, DCSF, DIUS and the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) carried out a review of the likelihood of the 2010 target for NEETs (not in education, employment or training) being met. (The target is to reduce the percentage of 16-18 year olds classified as NEET by 2 percentage points by 2010, from a baseline of 10 per cent at the end of 2004). The review results from the fact that although there has been good progress in reducing the number of 16 and 17 year olds who are NEET, this appears partially to have been offset by a rise in the number 18 year olds who are NEET. Recent data suggests that 13.7 percent of 18 year olds are NEET. The report of the review, including its recommendations, is currently with Ministers for their consideration and clearance. During late August/September, DCSF colleagues will develop and action/implementation plan to take forward the recommendations made and LSC colleagues will work closely with them in its development.

**Attainment at 19**

- The LSC has been participating in a DCSF led review looking at the barriers to increasing the numbers of young people achieving level 3, the characteristics of those who achieve level 3, where they achieve, and what more can be done to help the supply chain deliver the level 3 PSA target for 2011. The review identifies five key challenges that need to be addressed to accelerate progress: performance management (being clear about who is responsible for L3 performance in the system and for improving it); information, advice and guidance pre 16; literacy and numeracy; apprenticeships and good practice sharing.

**Learning Agreement Pilots**

- Performance is encouraging (at year 3, quarter 1) with the profile exceeded, for young people in jobs without training signing up to a learning agreement. The best performing pilots have achieved completion rates close to 60% while keeping attrition rates below 20% for a cohort of learners and group of employers not automatically disposed to participating in accredited learning. As the pilots are due to end in July 2009, the focus is now on their legacy and what arrangements may be put in place to engage with this cohort in preparation for the raising of the participation age.

**Research: The Wider Landscape of Learner Support**

- The LSC’s Learner Support Programme has a crucial role to play in addressing financial barriers faced by learners and potential learners. Beyond this support, financial help is also available through employment programmes and benefits provided by the DWP, Jobcentre Plus and HM Revenue and Customs. The LSC has commissioned the Centre for Economic and Social Inclusion to investigate the complete landscape of support for learners, as it exists now and how it might evolve to cope with future challenges such as raising the compulsory participation age, the Integrated Employment and Skills system and the Adult Advancement and Careers Service. The research will also show how the various types of support available interact, how they may overlap, and will highlight any gaps in the overall package of support available to learners.

**Skills Development Fund**

- The Leitch Review of Skills highlighted inefficiencies in the current adult learner support arrangements and recommended a system of financial support based upon the principles of clarity and targeting to help those who need it most. As part of this, a new Skills Development Fund (SDF) was proposed to
help tackle the financial barriers faced by those people who want to improve their skills. The intention is that the fund will capture and brigade all categories of adult financial support under one umbrella; underpinned by clear and accurate information and advice on an individuals' eligibility or entitlement for support. This will help to provide a clear and transparent package of learner support that enables a comprehensive (and up front) response to the full range of financial barriers which face adults when entering education and training.

Infrastructure – competitions, presumptions

- Following earlier discussions with LSC, DCSF made a submission to Ministers on 11 July regarding the intention to identify sixth form colleges as a separate legal entity. The submission includes the criteria to be used to identify them. LSC colleagues are to meet with DCSF on 9 September to discuss progress made in regard of changes to the competitions and presumptions processes as identified by the MoG consultation document.

Learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities (LLDD)

- There has been much recent discussion between the LSC and DCSF regarding the future duties of LAs regarding learners with LDD (i.e. to what age group those duties should apply and where the funding should lie to enable these duties to be fulfilled). The issues are now the subject of discussion between DCSF and DIUS.

Young Offenders

- DCSF colleagues have shared the draft policy intent and parliamentary instructions document with LSC and asked for our comments. The Bill will be introduced in the new Session of Parliament

Adult Learning, Skills and Employment

Apprenticeships

- The draft Apprenticeship Bill (published in July 2008 for consultation) sets out the role of the National Apprenticeship Service (NAS) and establishes a statutory basis for the apprenticeship programme, ensuring that employers and individuals can be confident of receiving a high quality route to up-skilling. The consultation ends on 8 October 2008, with a paper providing detail on the contents of the draft Bill presented under the standing item on apprenticeships.

- The NAS Delivery Plan has been finalised and is awaiting Ministerial clearance (it was delayed due to the recess). Once agreed, the LSC will develop a schedule of key papers for discussion at Council.

- Recruitment of the project posts for the NAS field force across all regions is taking place. The field force will be the outward face of the new service working with employers, individuals and providers to provide high quality support and increase the uptake of apprenticeships. All regions will be staffed with project teams by November 2008.

Train to Gain (TtG)

- In support of our commitment to reducing bureaucracy within Train to Gain, the recent guidance on the new TtG flexibilities signalled our expectation that in 2009/10 a single contract will be issued for colleges and training providers across all regions. It also stated that where training is addressing the needs of learners and employers, successful colleges and training providers will be able to increase their contracts both in their existing region and across the country, without the need to go through a further tendering exercise.

- Guidance was issued to Regional Directors at the end of August to set out the operational arrangements for this in 2008/09 with a view to 2009/10. This set out that with immediate effect, the
LSC is allowing all providers that hold an LSC contract for Train to Gain (single region or multi-region including responsive contracts) that wish to expand into a region in which they do not currently have a contract, to do so from their existing contract (or contracts), in line with the intended position for 2009/10. This approach will enable providers who can grow in year to do so without the need to go through any additional processes in each region, so reducing the level of bureaucracy involved, and so enable the LSC to bring about a managed move to single contracts for 2009/10.

- Targets and monthly profiles for 2008/09 have now been agreed with regions, including the volumes expected through sector compacts. LSC and DIUS are currently finalising policy and operational arrangements for the £30 million ring-fenced for provider capacity building.

- National and regional planning for transition of skills brokerage to Regional Development Agencies (RDAs) in April 2009 is progressing well and it is hoped all 9 regional transition plans will be approved by Ministers during August. It has been agreed with RDAs, DIUS and the Department for Business, Enterprise and Regulatory Reform (DBERR) that no LSC staff will transfer to RDAs.

**National Employer Service (NES)**

- In July and August 2008, 21 new leads were referred to NES, and 14 new business meetings were held. The new leads included Caterpillar, General Electric (GE), Kentucky Fried Chicken, Morrisons, Pfizer, Thomson Reuters, WH Smith and WS Atkins. Another 15 employers are currently working towards a contract with NES, including: B&Q, DHL Supply Chain and Virgin Atlantic Airways. NES apprenticeship delivery continues to be very strong, with some employers switching from Train to Gain delivery into adult apprenticeships. Several NES apprenticeship contracts have expanded significantly this year, including Vodafone and BUPA; new contracts include Phones4U and Superdrug who will between them have delivered nearly 2000 apprentices in 2007/08. Starting in 2008, Royal Mail plans to deliver more than 1000, McDonalds 800 and Sainsbury’s 1500 apprentices.

**Focusing ESOL on community cohesion – key messages from the consultation (confidential - early intentions that have not been made public yet)**

- Earlier in 2008, DIUS consulted on how LSC funded ESOL provision could be more specifically targeted to promote integration and community cohesion. Following the consultation, Ministers have agreed plans for development of a coherent local planning and partnership approach, built on 5 core areas. These are needs analysis; business planning, commissioning and funding; roles and responsibilities; the role of ESOL for Work in community cohesion; and communication. To begin work, DIUS have agreed the following actions: to publish a ‘Next Steps’ document this autumn to set out the policy and to develop an Impact Assessment, Accountabilities Framework, Commissioning Plan, Relationship Management Plan and Communication Strategy by January 2009. LSC is currently in debate with DIUS over the feasibility of a 2009/10 implementation date for new arrangements.

**UK Vocational Qualification Reform Programme**

- Ministers have accepted the outline business case for the Qualifications and Credit Framework (QCF) and agreed that work to further develop the strategic delivery option and full business case should now proceed. Ministers also acknowledged the work LSC had already taken forward in developing a business change strategy for those aspects of QCF implementation which are LSC responsibilities (i.e. planning, funding and performance).

- This led to the LSC being commissioned by David Lammy to undertake an urgent and thorough feasibility and impact assessment of the preferred delivery model and to report at the end of September. The preferred model focuses systems development on the expansion of the current functionality of the on-line learner record, which is being developed by the Managing Information across Partners (MIAP) initiative under the LSC’s leadership. A final decision from the Minister on the roll-out of the QCF is expected later this autumn.
Foundation Learning Tier (FLT)

- The LSC has confirmed the list of almost 200 providers participating in the development and delivery of Progression Pathways within the FLT during 2008/09 – the first phase of implementation. The list is located on the LSC’s website at: (http://qfr.lsc.gov.uk/NR/exeres/7ADCE979-D8A9-467C-96AA-052B33031E64,frameless.htm?NRMODE=Published).

- The revised Prospectus for Progression Pathways has also been published; this is a working version to underpin delivery in 2008/09. The Prospectus supports the design, planning and delivery of Progression Pathways across entry level and level 1 of the QCF. The QCA and LSC are also finalising awareness-raising materials, including a ‘glossy’ brochure for publication later in the autumn, to support the phased implementation of Progression Pathways. In addition, the LSC and QCA are organising a large-scale, national FLT conference with Ministerial input. The conference aims to raise awareness of the FLT reforms and their impact across both 14-19 and adult delivery of entry level and level 1 provision. Initial planning indicates a conference on 11 November 2008 with input from David Lammy.

Technology for Learning

- The LSC has finalised its Technology for Learning programme for 2008-09. Investment in the Joint Information Systems Committee (JISC) will continue as in previous years in order to maintain the availability of its services, such as Regional Support Centres, to the FE and Skills sector. Capital investment in technology infrastructure will also continue across the sector.

Offenders’ Learning and Skills Service (OLASS)

- Procurement of OLASS Phase 3 is underway, for contracts from 1 August 2009. From 227 pre-qualification questionnaires assessed at the first stage of the process, 127 organisations were successful, and will be invited to tender for an OLASS Phase 3 contract. There were 34 submissions from voluntary and community sector providers and 52 organisations expressed an interest in delivery in more than one region. 35 organisations sought to be considered as national providers.

- OLASS contracts currently number 28, but the total number of contracts to be let for OLASS Phase 3 will not be confirmed until the (potentially revised) units of procurement are properly scoped and determined on completion of the Offenders’ Skills and Curriculum Area Reviews (OSCARS). OSCARS are due to be completed at the end of August 2009.

National Skills Academies (NSAs)

- A Ministerial announcement of new NSAs will follow selection in early September 2008 and the Academies will be invited to develop their business plans shortly after. The fourth round Prospectus resulted in 16 expressions of interest, and a panel of LSC, DIUS and BERR colleagues, with employer advisers, has drawn up a shortlist.

- The NSA for Retail was approved in July 2008. Skills Minister David Lammy said “The Retail Academy will play a pivotal role in helping to ensure the existing and future workforce has the right skills to meet the challenges facing the sector.” The Skills Academy is supported by major retail employers such as BAA, Boots, Dollond and Aitchison, John Lewis Partnership, Marks and Spencer and Tesco. The Academy will operate through a network of 70 highly-professional retail Skills Shops, run by local partnerships of developers, training providers, Jobcentre Plus and importantly, retailers themselves.

Careers Information and Advice Service: preparing for the new Adult Advancement and Careers Service (AACS)

- Delivery of the new nextstep service commenced on 1 August 2008, all prime contractors are delivering to the new service specification. In some areas there have been issues with sub-contracting arrangements and a revised arrangement is being developed to enable contracting with the voluntary and community sector.
• Preparation for the commencement of integrated employment and skills trials of aspects of the Adult Advancement and Careers Service focused on Jobcentre Plus customers in the West Midlands is advanced with the skills health check diagnostic tool on track to be available on 29 September 2008. Volumes have been agreed and co-location arrangements are being finalised.

• The transfer of learndirect careers advice service to the LSC is scheduled to take place on 1 October 2008, when the staff transfer and contracts novate to the LSC. Ufi and the LSC have agreed interim arrangements for the hosting of the careers advice website to ensure service continuity for the customer. The learndirect brand is being removed from the website and all marketing materials in readiness for an advertising campaign in September 2008.

Skills Accounts

• The operating model and business processes for Skills Accounts have now been signed off by the Skills Accounts Project Board. Project management arrangements and roles and responsibilities have been agreed giving a greater degree of clarity to usage of resources between DIUS and LSC.

• A launch date of 29th September has been agreed for 20 learning providers to introduce Skills Accounts in the trial regions of East Midlands and South East. As part of this, workshops have been held on equality and diversity and risk/fraud prevention in August 2008 to highlight and reduce potential areas of concern/ issues and risk; testing and training of provider systems has commenced and marketing collateral has been agreed.

Integrated Employment and Skills (IES) Trials

• Work is ongoing to finalise a roll out plan for IES trials across the next seven Jobcentre Plus districts, following the planned launch in the West Midlands on 29 September 2008. Final plans are due to be signed off in early September. Further discussions are now taking place with Jobcentre Plus with a view to determining the 2009/10 -2010/11 rollout. Rollout will be planned to cover geographic spread and other benefit groups a project health check has been undertaken and completed in August, leading to an overall amber/green rating for the West Midlands trial.

Co-commissioning

• Proposals for co-commissioning trials involving LSC and DWP have been put together in the North West and West Midlands. Further work with DWP is being undertaken to develop the approach to commissioning integrated employment and skills provision in the trial areas. In the West Midlands the proposals involve new approaches to Train to Gain, supporting people to enter employment through identified vacancies with specific employers. In the North West, the LSC is working to support Local Authorities and other partners by enhancing the DWP Flexible New Deal Offer, with Manchester Enterprises acting as the managing agent on behalf of the 10 Local Authorities.

The new ambition

• Work is currently being undertaken to identify programmes and funding streams to provide individuals who could count towards the new ambition, announced in Work Skills, of 100,000 people obtaining sustainable employment and achieving a qualification in 2010/11. This will allow the LSC to identify if further activity is required to support the achievement of this target, and therefore build any requirements into commissioning plans.

Skills for Jobs

• As ESF funding is distributed in Euros, and the exchange rate has recently changed, the LSC will be able to offer further ESF funded opportunities over the coming period. Following changes in Government policy and programme definitions, work is ongoing to ensure that any new activity compliments existing programmes and activity. This is likely to be more emphasis on those who have
recently entered the workplace, to ensure that they are supported to adjust to the demands of the workplace better and to remain in employment.

SECTION 4: RISKS AND ISSUES

- In July, Management Group and the National Audit Committee agreed the LSC’s top four risks. These are set out below.

1. Machinery of Government (owner David Russell)
2. Finance and Systems (owner David Russell)
3. Performance: Train to Gain and Apprenticeships (owner David Way)
4. Demand Led Funding: Provider Capacity (owner Verity Bullough)

- The LSC has a refreshed risk management process which will ensure that there is a clear line of sight between risks identified from across the organisation and the four corporate risks set out above. These risks will be managed by national and regional risk champions and overseen by the Risk Management Board reporting to Management Group. Issues will be escalated to Council as appropriate.

- It is proposed that in subsequent reports, National Council receive an executive summary of information provided to Management Group from the Risk Management Board on risks. This will enable Council to maintain an overview of the latest position against the LSC’s top four risks on a regular basis. As Management Group have not met since the July report to Council, no update is provided in this report.

Demand Led Funding (DLF) Programme OGC Gateway Review

- In July and August, the Office for Government and Commerce conducted a gateway review of the LSC’s DLF programme. The outcome of the review was very positive with an amber status being awarded overall. The report of the review concluded that, ‘the Programme is well positioned to succeed in delivering its outcomes. The Programme is currently on time and within budget. Senior business input at SRO and Board level has been strengthened in recognition that the programme is a complex and key business change programme for the LSC. The main area of concern is around the identification and measurement of the DLF programme benefits.’ Members of the DLF team will now be taking forward the actions and recommendations in the report.
Update on GCSE results 2008

- On 21 August, the Joint Council for Qualifications (JCQ) published data on GCSE results for 16 year olds in England, Wales and Northern Ireland. Those data give the achievements by subject area only, with data at school and individual pupil level not being available until mid-October (which will include, for example, the proportions gaining five GCSEs at A*-C including English and Maths).

- The data are somewhat difficult to interpret, as the size of the cohort has fallen, and there appears to be a move towards pupils entering for fewer subjects (from an average of just over eight to just under eight); in addition, there is evidence of an increase in the numbers being entered for English and Mathematics in the January 2008 examinations, which are not included in these data. The published data show an overall increase in the proportion of grades awarded at A* and A, and increases in the proportions of entries achieving grades A*-C in English compared to 2007 (from 62.2% to 62.9%) and in Mathematics (from 55.2% to 56.3%). In Science, there have been significant curriculum changes since 2007, but the data appear to show an overall increase in the numbers of pupils studying Science subjects. The full data are at www.jcq.org.uk

GCE A and AS results 2008

- The GCE A and AS level results for 2008 were published on 14 August. The data show an increase in the numbers taking the examinations, an increase in the overall pass rate, increase in the proportion of passes at grade A and, encouragingly, increases in Mathematics, Physics, Chemistry and Biology. Much of the press coverage centred around regional variations in the results, often being described as a “North/South divide”, as shown in the table below:

GCE A and AS level Further Mathematics

- In 2005, and on behalf of the Department, the LSC entered into a five year, £10 million contract with Mathematics in Education and Industry to establish networks in each of the, then, 47 LSC areas within England, linking schools, colleges and Universities, with the intention of increasing the numbers of young people studying Further Mathematics. The A and AS level results for 2008 show the number of young people in England studying AS level Further Maths has risen from 4,809 in 2005 to 8,600 in 2008 (a rise of 79%) and A level Further Maths has risen from 5,627 to 8,743 (a rise of 55%). These figures are far in excess of the increase in the overall numbers studying A or AS levels, which are 6% and 5% respectively.