The Office of the Third Sector (OTS), Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills (DIUS) and the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) this week (16th January) held a Ministerial reception to celebrate the award of funding contracts worth a total £7.6 million to Third Sector organisations. The contract awards to 43 organisations, 16 of which are new suppliers, shows the LSC’s ongoing commitment to the Third Sector.

The LSC is making great strides in strengthening its relationships within the Third Sector, which it sees as a key strategic and delivery partner in developing policies and programmes to reach out into communities which are traditionally hard to engage.

A key part of building the relationship was the launch of the Working Together Advisory Group in December 2006, which brought together experts from across the Third Sector to advise the LSC on policy and help strengthen the LSC’s links with its partners. In the last twelve months, the Group has focused on simplifying the application process for LSC contracts.

Chris Banks, Chairman of the LSC, said: “The Third Sector has a vital role to play in reaching out to the hardest to help in our society, providing opportunities to learn and train that wouldn’t otherwise exist. That is why the LSC is dedicated to improving its working relationship with its Third Sector partners; and following the advice of the LSC’s Third Sector Working Together Group, we are updating tendering conditions and support to applicants, making it more accessible for Third Sector organisations.

All of these measures will support the LSC’s and the Third Sector’s shared aim of ensuring that we help the most disadvantaged in our society to fulfil their potential”
Phil Hope MP, Minister for the Third Sector, said: “I am greatly encouraged that the Learning and Skills Council is taking active steps to engage the Third Sector. Charities, voluntary groups and other Third Sector organisations are right on the frontline, working to address some of the most challenging issues that face our society. Getting the right skills in the right place is crucial to success and I know that the Third Sector will embrace any support that better enables them to meet their challenges.”

David Lammy MP, Minister for Skills, said: "The Plan for Growth set out our ambitions to make Train to Gain the Government’s premier skills service. By 2010-11 the Government will spend more than £1 billion through Train to Gain to support employers of all sizes in all sectors, including the voluntary sector. In opening up this service to support volunteers, we recognise the massive contribution that these people make to the productivity of this country.”

To build on this success, the LSC is extending the coverage of Train to Gain to fully fund volunteers seeking Skills for Life or first Level 2 qualifications and a contribution towards the costs of a Level 3 qualification, as well as the employees of Third Sector organisations who are already served by the Service. This change was made following advice from the Working Together Advisory Group.

Train to Gain will offer volunteers a new opportunity to develop vocationally recognised qualifications within the workplace. The extended offer will be open to any organisation (including voluntary sector organisations), engaging with the Train to Gain Service. Train to Gain skills brokers will visit Third Sector organisations and discuss how investing in skills can help them achieve their organisational objectives in the normal way going forward, and unpaid volunteers will be able to participate on the same basis as the organisation’s paid employees.

The LSC’s relationship with the Third Sector has to be framed within the strategies and priorities set by Government which focus on maximum participation and attainment for young people, and on economically valuable skills and economic and social inclusion for adults. The Third Sector is championed at a national level within the LSC by Rob Wye, Director of Strategy, Communications and Learning, Margaret Coleman as Regional Director with a functional lead and stakeholder champion, and a nominated executive-level champion in each LSC region.

-ENDS-
Notes to editors

**Learning and Skills Council**
The LSC exists to make England better skilled and more competitive. We are responsible for ensuring the availability of high-quality education and training for everyone. We have a single goal: to improve the skills of England’s young people and adults to world class standards. Our vision is that young people and adults in England have knowledge and skills matching the best in the world and are part of a truly competitive workforce. We work nationally, regionally and locally to deliver this ambition on behalf of learners and employers.

**About the Working Together Strategy**
The LSC published a strategy for working with the Voluntary and Community Sector in May 2004. This briefing paper updates the strategy and outlines the current engagement between the LSC and the Third Sector (which comprises VCS, charities, social enterprise organisations, mutuals and co-operatives).

Evidence from a range of sources has proved to the Government that the Third Sector are best placed to deliver some public services to certain groups of service users, often those furthest away from mainstream provision.

The LSC have also recognised that some learners prefer to start their learner journey through the Third Sector, and others find that it is through outreach contact with the Third Sector that they get involved in learning. The LSC wish to ensure that in all of its processes and procedures the Third Sector is treated equitably with other providers, and that the niche contribution of the Third Sector to the LSC is recognised and understood.

The work being undertaken includes:
- Changing our management information systems so that the LSC are clear of who the Third Sector organisations are, and what their contribution currently is to our targets and priorities
- Ensuring that all of our processes are Compact compliant
- Ensuring that where the Third Sector are in partnership / franchising arrangements with other providers, that this arrangement is fair and equitable to the Third Sector provider
- “Proofing” our procurement processes so that the Third Sector are not disadvantaged by the process (this is equally important for other new providers to the LSC)
- Identifying the particular workforce development needs of the sector so that they have the workforce capacity to offer the range of public services that the Government wish to procure
- Creating a staff development programme for LSC staff to understand the role and functions of Third Sector organisations, and the different features of their organisational type.

**About Train to Gain new arrangements**
To receive Train to Gain services for volunteers, the organisation simply needs to confirm that the individual is an unpaid volunteer rather than a contracted employee. The volunteer will need to satisfy the normal Train to Gain learner eligibility rules, but this will give them new access to work related accredited training.

The achievement of new qualifications linked to their voluntary work, will have big benefits for them – potentially a stepping stone into permanent employment.
As volunteers are unpaid the Train to Gain wage compensation arrangements (which apply to companies employing fewer than 50 FTE workers) will not apply.

Members of the Working Together Advisory Group

**Shirley Cramer** (Chair)
Chief Executive of Dyslexia Action, she serves on the National Board of the LSC and chairs the Equality and Diversity Committee.

**John Harris**
Workforce and Skills Development Co-ordinator at the Yorkshire and Humber Regional Forum, experience working in housing sector, mental health services and in child care.

**Robin Hodgkinson**
Training Manager for Suffolk Association of Voluntary Organisations (SAVO) for ten years previously worked in local government and education sector.

**Tim Ward**
Works for Learning Curve, a voluntary learning consortia and has over twenty-five years experience in learning and training.

**Andy Shields**
Director of Work and Learning at St Mungo’s, he has worked with homeless people since the mid-1980’s in a variety of roles.

**Deborah Bullivant**
Director of Rathbone – Yorkshire and North East, she has worked in adult education for 20 years.

**Jane Slowey**
Chief Executive of Foyer since September 2004, and has been Vice Chair of the National Council for Voluntary Organisations since 2003.

**Richard Williams**
Chief Executive of Rathbone since July 2004 has worked in Further Education for 25 years.

**Dr Cheryl Turner**
Development Officer (VCS) NIACE, twenty years of teaching and research experience.

**Lynne Bryan**
Learning and Development Manager at the National Association for Voluntary and Community Action (NAVCA).

**Mollie Temple**
Chair of the Board of Local Care Direct, extensive education and Third Sector experience and expertise in the field of Social Enterprise.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION
LSC Website: www.lsc.gov.uk

All public enquiries please contact:
LSC Helpdesk: 0870 900 6800

All media enquiries please contact:
LSC Press Office
Ann Gill 0247 682 3515 ann.s.gill@lsc.gov.uk
Shavaun Glen 0247 682 5879 shavaun.glen@lsc.gov.uk

Cohn & Wolfe:
Alison Hicks 0207 331 5452 alison_hicks@uk.cohnwolfe.com
Tom Mackey 0207 331 5372 tom.mackey@uk.cohnwolfe.com