Date: 13 September 2006
Subject: Equality and Diversity Committee meeting
Location: Grosvenor Gardens, London
Time: 10:30
LSC office: National Office
Publication intent: Internal

Present: Shirley Cramer, Jeremy Crook, David Barker, Peter Lavender, Patrick Grattan, Sally McEnhill, Judith Norrington, Caroline Slocock, Mike Adams, Alan Davies

In attendance: Sally Stewart (Item 5) Julie Hobbins (Item 9), Debbie Watson (Item 10)

LSC staff: Melanie Hunt, Lee Probert, Alison Kakoura

Apologies: Apologies have been received from: Amir Kabal, Nicola Dandridge, Yvonne Thompson, Alyson Malach.

Item 1. Welcome and introductions
1.1 The Chair welcomed all present to the meeting and apologies for absence were noted. Jeremy Crook was thanked for chairing the previous meeting.
1.2 The Chair formally advised members that Hilary Wiseman had stood down as a committee member and a letter of thanks would be sent to Hilary to thank her for her time and commitment.

Action: Chair to write a letter of thanks to Hilary Wiseman.

Item 2. Minutes of last meeting
2.1 The minutes of the meetings on 17 May and 14 July were agreed as accurate records of the discussions and actions.

Item 3. Matters arising and action log
3.1 Members wished the minutes to note that when there is a shorter meeting, agenda items should be kept to a minimum in order to give sufficient discussion time to each subject. For the joint meeting, it was also agreed that there should be a reduced agenda.
3.2 Judith Norrington reported that the first meeting of the Migration Task Force had taken place and that she had circulated copies of the minutes.
3.3 She asked that the minutes be circulated again as some members had not received them.

**Action: Clerk to circulate minutes of migration task force meeting to all members.**

3.4 Members noted that an update from the Olympic Steering Committee would be due at the next committee meeting.

3.5 Members reaffirmed their request for an opportunity to hear from the DfES legislative team on the implications of the Age Legislation due to come into force from 1 October 2006. The DfES committee member confirmed that he would liaise with the team and arrange for the DfES team to attend the next meeting of the Committee

**Item 4. Update on Streamlining Accountabilities**

4.1 The Chair addressed the meeting and reported on the latest discussions between the DfES, Ministers and the LSC Chair, regarding the future structure for the local and regional non-executive. She cautioned that the information she was about to share was still confidential and not to be discussed outside the meeting. Members had several comments and suggestions to make in response.

4.2 Members were assured that there remained a very strong need for the Equality and Diversity Committee to retain its current role in advising not only the executive, but also partners, providers and stakeholders on good practice in equality and diversity issues.

4.3 The majority of members welcomed the reforms but had a number of observations to make:

- advice to the National Council should be adequate and timely, with consideration of unintended consequences of policies.
- There should be a clear definition of the difference between national and regional policies
- The creation of learner panels was good, but there was a need to ensure parity of regard for both young people and adult learners. There was a need for the creation of a disability forum.

4.4 The Chair closed the discussion and affirmed that she would bring further updates to the next meeting.

**Item 5. HR Equality and Diversity Strategy**

5.1 The Chair welcomed to the meeting Sally Stewart, Director of HR and invited her to update the members on the progress of the HR Equality and Diversity Strategy.

5.2 The Director began with the theme 7 issues: theme 7 was still ongoing and every effort was being made to ensure that vacancies were filled with members from under-represented groups; recruitment road shows would be held and people from diverse groups encouraged to apply; Barkers recruitment agency had been asked to commission a report on people's
perceptions of the LSC to better identify areas for improvement; employee networks in the form of diversity subgroups would be set up in the regions.

5.3 The Director summarised by reporting that the HR action plan had numerous activities and was changing all the time, she would bring further updates on activities to the next meeting. With regard to the statistical analysis, members were asked to see a comparative report of the current BME numbers.

5.4 Action: Sally Stewart to bring comparative breakdown to next meeting. Action: Members invited to send comments and suggestions for the action plan to the Director.

5.5 Members were invited to comment on and ask for clarification on the HR Director’s report, and the following points were made:

- Members were pleased to hear that work placements had been set up for school leavers but added that it should also be extended to college learners.

- Concern was expressed by a number of members present that the numbers of reported cases of workplace bullying had decreased, suggesting that people were in fact finding it more difficult to report instances and not easier as the Director’s report suggested. Members strongly suggested that the figures were given further consideration.

- With regard to Annex 4 of the Director’s report on the recommendations from “The LSC as an Employer” report, members expressed concern that there should be opportunities for LSC employees to raise issues which might be lost at a regional level. One member strongly urged that there should be separate networks for each of the core equality strands. The HR Director however was anxious that this should not result in a myriad of networks. It was important that the networks were managed by the staff themselves. At the present time the number and nature of networks was an unknown quantity although some informal networks already existed.

- Another member made the point that, with theme 7 well under way, there were now fewer people trying to continue the work started by now absent colleagues, and that if they were not supported they would be more susceptible to stress and illness. This was particularly true of people with disabilities, who might be reluctant to declare any difficulties. The Director confirmed that a disability questionnaire had been circulated to staff which could be completed anonymously, and the findings would be considered when looking at how to encourage staff to declare disabilities in an open and positive way.

- When asked about how the LSC was delivering its in-house training, the Director explained that some was e-based and some was through national contracts. The members asked the Director to bring some of the training materials to a future meeting.

Item 6. FE reform and REIA Consultation

6.1 The DfES observer for the Committee was invited to speak to members on the progress to date on the race equality impact assessment currently being carried out across the LSC and the DfES; and in particular how the Equality
and Diversity Committee could support this work. Members were informed that the DfES website featured a link to the consultation document on which interested parties would be able to make comments. The Equality and Diversity Committee would be specifically targeted for its comments and would be contacted within the following few days.

6.2 The member from the Disability Rights Commission asked about the extent to which the White Paper was being disability impact assessed and was informed that initially the White Paper impact assessment would focus on race and would then move its focus to disability in December. The DRC member queried the benefit of carrying out the consultation in this sequential manner and went on to emphasise the importance of involving disabled people in meaningful consultation as soon as possible.

Item 7. Single Equality Scheme

7.1 The Equality and Diversity Policy Manager, supported by the member from NIACE, gave a verbal update on the progress of the Single Equality Scheme, and reported that Judith Summers had now been commissioned with writing the document. He welcomed any advice and comments from the members, in particular on the question of whether the Single Equality Strategy should stand alone as a separate document or as part of a National Equality and Diversity document, given the need to reduce the number of documents produced by the LSC.

7.2 With regard to the timetable for producing a strategy document, the member from NIACE informed the Committee that a final draft would have to be complete by Spring 2007. In the meantime members would be invited to comment and advise on drafts as they were produced.

7.3 The Equality and Diversity Policy Manager pointed out that the key question for consideration was how to make the strategy tangible across the LSC and give it a more corporate nature so that all LSC staff could have a sense of ownership of the strategy.

7.4 In response to the request for advice, members had the following comments to make:

- The strategy must be simple and clear at a strategic level
- Generic principles should apply across all strands of equality and diversity
- Make greater use of evidence based statistics to inform the action plan
- There should be a subgroup of committee members formed to advise the writer before committing the strategy to a document.

Item 8 Director’s Report

8.1 Members were invited to make any comments on the report via email to the Equality and Diversity Policy Manager. The report contained some of the information from the July meeting which had not been discussed at that
meeting. The key items from the report had been covered elsewhere on the agenda.

8.2 The Policy Manager asked members for their comments on the items in the Director's Report:

- Members agreed that they would like to have regional reports on the impact of the Equality and Diversity strategy and examples of where it was working well, or not. The policy manager informed the Committee that invitations would be sent to the Regional Directors to attend the meetings on a regular basis in order to give updates on the work in progress in their regions.

- One member felt that the report should look more specifically at the impact that the LSC's initiatives, such as “Train to Gain”, were having on learners from the point of view of equality and diversity, and should also include a candid appraisal of where the difficult discussions were taking place.

In response the Director for Learning informed the Committee that the full staffing complement had only just been put into place and a very large remit agreed with regard to equality and diversity. The Policy Manager had been involved in the appointment of regional Equality and Diversity managers which would facilitate a more regular exchange of information between regions, national office and ultimately the Committee.

**Item 9. European Social Fund reduced allocations – Impact on Equality and Diversity**

9.1 The Chair welcomed Julie Robbins, Head of ESF Funding at the LSC, to speak to the committee about the changes to ESF policy and allocations.

9.2 She began by explaining how the LSC had used ESF funding in the past, with the emphasis on working with disadvantaged and hard to reach groups of learners. The newest programme, reviewed as a result of the enlargement of the European Union, estimates a 50% reduction in the current £500m pa available funding for England. However it had been proposed that the new programme was completely co-financed, rather than the current direct bidding process of 60% against 40%.

9.3 She went on to inform members of the range of LSC programmes supported by LSC funding and referred to the tables and graphs in the meeting paper, pointing out that ESF supported higher than average proportions of women, ethnic minorities, learners with learning difficulties and disabilities and people from disadvantaged communities compared to LSC provision in general.

9.4 Finally she described how the LSC proposed to manage the reduction in funding, whilst ensuring that the LSC maintained a delivery remit in the two main priorities of extending employment opportunities and developing a skilled and adaptable workforce.
9.5 The Chair lead the questions and comments by asking how the Equality and Diversity Committee could contribute to negotiations with the DWP, ESFD, the treasury and Ministers to push forward a favourable allocation for the LSC. The Head of ESF funding informed members that there would be a further opportunity for them to comment on the consultation document after the Government had responded to the first draft.

9.6 One member commented that with less funding it would be important to ensure that providers gave value for money and quality in sustainable training. She added that available funds should not be spread too thinly but targeted where they would make a difference. Another member suggested that this Committee should make recommendations to assist the pilot schemes for outsourcing Job CentrePlus work.

9.7 Other comments which the ESF team should consider included:

- The impact of co-financing on adults who wanted to change, develop or move from provision using ESF funding to other alternatively sourced provision
- Consideration of qualifications and outcomes from ESF funded courses and how these are aligned with nationally recognised qualifications.

The Chair thanked Julie for presenting the information to the Committee and asked that the Committee be kept informed of further updates.

**Item 10 Annual Statement of Priorities**

10.1 The Chair welcomed Debbie Watson (Director of Policy and Innovation) who had been invited to the meeting to advise members on the progress of the LSC Annual Statement of Priorities (ASP)

10.2 She briefly explained the timetable for publishing the ASP, which would be one document setting out the “whole story” – this would be Wednesday 16 October 2006. She reminded members that they were invited to the Chairs’ Day on 9 October, when the document would be launched internally.

10.3 She went on to outline the four main priorities for the LSC at the current time:

- young people – preparing them for further and/or higher education and employment;
- improving skills for productivity post 19;
- public sector reform – to strengthen regional skills;
- transformation of the system;

and ended by asking the committee for its views on how equality and diversity could be embedded into each priority.
10.4 A number of members agreed that it was important to retain these four priorities and build on them in successive reviews as the continuity of statements would strengthen the perception of the LSC. However members had a number of suggested amendments to offer on the wording of the statements.

10.5 One member referred to the third priority and pointed out that the LSC did not “deliver” public sector reform but rather “supported the delivery of in partnership with…..” and suggested the wording should be changed accordingly. Other members also expressed doubt about the use of the expression “demand –led “ as being ambiguous and open to misinterpretation. Alternatively the statement could read…” The LSC is responsive to learners and employers…”. Similarly the expression “…to build a world class system…” was judged to be inappropriate, given the fact that the LSC worked within the policies and budget of the government. Another member pointed out that references to young people and adults should be removed as they assume a distinction which in reality did not or should not exist rather the statement should refer to opportunity for all regardless of age.

10.6 One member felt that the LSC management had not fully understood the barriers to opportunity relating to age. The member was assured that the comment would be passed on to the management group as soon as possible.

10.7 Members expressed unease with how the language used to describe the LSC’s mission gave the impression that the LSC was taking sole responsibility for, rather than being a contributor to, the vision of the world to be. They felt it was important to be able to state what could and what could not happen with the available funding. Finally members were agreed that it was essential to have the words “equal access and opportunity for all” in a central and prominent position.

10.8 The Chair thanked the Director for giving the members an opportunity to contribute to the preparation of the ASP.

**Item 11 Sub Committee and Commissions updates**

11.1 The Chair invited members to give verbal feedback on the progress of the sub-committees, and items of interest from the Commissions

**Equal Opportunities Commission**

11.2 The member from the EOC spoke briefly on the findings in the report on Black and Minority Ethnic Women, and referred to the summary document which had been circulated to committee members prior to the meeting. In summary, there was a positive picture of BME girls’ ambitions at age 16, with the majority having the same aspirations and support as white girls. However
the picture at post 16 showed that girls were starting to fall back into stereotype careers or jobs, fuelling their segregation even more. The report suggested that it was an opportunity for employers to plug into these groups with good development and careers advice, and to open up the high earning jobs to all. The report identified entry to employment and re-entry to employment as being the significant trigger points.

11.3 The Director of Learning confirmed that the LSC was currently working on guidance for young people and assured the Committee that the findings of the report would feed into that work. The member from the EOC stressed the urgency of carrying out the work.

**LLDD Sub group**

11.4 David Barker gave a brief update on the work of the Mental Health subgroup, and in particular referred to the Mental health glossy. He passed on the concern of the mental health task group and that of the LLDD subgroup that the LSC appeared to be lacking in confidence in discussions about mental health and disability issues, which could be misinterpreted as a lack of commitment. The groups felt that the LSC could be more proactive in tackling the issues and promoting its commitment to equality. He pointed out that the publication of the above report had not been mentioned in any LSC press release. The Director of Learning agreed to take the matter up with the Communications team.

11.5 Members were invited to feed back to the mental health sub-group with case stories of good or bad practice to inform future discussions.

Members requested that the issue of communications should be an item on the next meeting agenda

**Action:** Clerk to add Communications item on next agenda

**Item 12 papers for Information**

There were no items for discussion.

**Item 13 AOB**

There was no other business for discussion.

**Item 14 Date of next meeting**

The next meeting will be on 22 November 2006 at 8-10 Grosvenor Gardens, London.