Minutes

Date 26 January 2006
Subject Equality and Diversity Committee meeting
Location Grosvenor Gardens, London
Time 10:30
LSC office National Office
Publication intent Internal

Present Shirley Cramer, Jeremey Crook, David Barker, Patrick Grattan, Judith Norrington, Hilary Wiseman, Yvonne Thompson, Caroline Slocock, Nick O'Brien, Dr Marc Verlot,
In attendance Mark Haysom, Waqar Azmi, Maurice Biriotti, Rose Dowling, Alan Davies (DfES)
LSC staff Melanie Hunt, Paul Turner, Lee Probert, Beverley Matthews, Alison Kakoura
Apologies Apologies have been received from: Alyson Malach, Angela Mason, Peter Lavender, Amir Kabal, Sally McEnhill,

Item 1. Welcome and introductions
1.1 In her welcome the Chair thanked Paul Turner and Lee Probert for continuing to support the Equality and Diversity work at National Office in the continued absence of the Director.
1.2 She drew attention to the recent Green Paper outlining government proposals regarding Incapacity Benefit and that it would be an area of specific interest to the Committee which would need to be looked at in future meetings.
1.3 She welcomed the Chief Executive, Mark Haysom, Waqar Azmi from the Cabinet Office, Alan Davies from the DfES and Melanie Hunt, newly appointed national Director of Learning, who was attending the meeting for the first time.
1.4 Melanie was invited to say a few words about her appointment by way of introduction, and spoke of her strong commitment to Equality and Diversity.
Item 2. “Delivering a Diverse Civil Service – a 10 point plan.

2.1 Waqar Azmi was invited to speak to the Committee and began by pointing out that it was for the LSC to decide which areas of the 10 point plan would be useful to take forward. In its own organisation.

2.2 He outlined the factors in the Civil Service which led to the creation of his post and the key areas which needed reforming to meet the requirements of an effective Equality and Diversity agenda.

- **Targets** – these needed to be more stretching
- **Accountability and leadership** – needed to assign targets in this area too
- **Progress** – needed to be measurable and visible
- **Recruitment** – a need to get value for money from recruitment agencies who also need a set of targets to improve the diversity of the workforce they were taking on, posts at grade 7 and above needed flexible working conditions to encourage applications from a more diverse set of candidates, every interview panel needed representatives from the candidates field (with certain exceptions), the whole recruitment process needed equality proofing.
- **Talent and development** – fast streaming of potentially successful individuals to higher grades, guaranteed interviews for the disabled, reskilling of older employees.
- **Behaviour and Culture Change** – needed to adopt a policy of zero tolerance to discrimination, linked to reward schemes, establishment of a Diversity Champions Board at senior level in the organisation to measure progress and share good practice. Each department of the Civil service needed a delivery plan to ensure consistency of practice.

2.3 The Committee Chair thanked Waqar for his presentation and invited comments and questions from the members.

2.4 Members congratulated Waqar on what they considered was an essential and powerful piece of work. There were a number of questions asked which related to specific issues with gender, religion and sexual orientation which Waqar advised were addressed in the full text, which could be seen on the website.

**Action:** Clerk to provide members with a link to the Cabinet Office website

2.5 One member asked to see a copy of the brief sent to the department heads as it would be useful for the LSC in taking forward its own strategy along the same lines.

**Action:** Clerk to liaise with Waqar Azmi to obtain copy of brief for distribution to members.

2.6 A final point from one of the members elicited the comment from Waqar that the numbering of the 10 points in the plan was in no way indicative of their priority and that all points were of equal importance to the success of the Equality and Diversity Strategy for the Civil Service.
Item 3. Annual Statement of priorities – Delivering the Equality and Diversity Strategy – verbal presentation by Mark Haysom

3.1 The Chair welcomed the Chief Executive to the meeting and invited him to speak about Equality and Diversity embedding in the Statement of Priorities.

3.2 The Chief Executive began by thanking the Committee for the opportunity to listen to the previous presentation by Waqar Azmi on the 10 point plan, and spoke in support of the principles reflected in the plan.

3.3 He went on to highlight the main achievements of the LSC to date, and attributed a lot of the success to the work of the LSC Committees. He listed a number of areas of success including:

- record number of young people in learning
- record number of apprenticeships and increased completion rates
- record number of skills for life qualifications gained
- switching funding to priority areas
- higher quality of provision
- intense Capital investment in the system

He pointed out that none of the above could have been achieved without reaching out to all learners and communities, proving that Equality and Diversity was at the heart of the priorities which gave the LSC the agenda to progress.

3.4 He aligned the statements of priorities with the 6 priorities of the National Equality and Diversity Strategy and went on to advise members of the big ideas underpinning the themes in the agenda for change:

- The system must be demand led, and work for both employers and learners
- Providers must come together to remove barriers to true partnership and collaborative working
- There must be a simple method of funding and moving resources to the front line and a reduction of bureaucracy
- The LSC should strive for Excellence in Business, running colleges as value for money businesses
- The LSC should be transparent when sharing data and information about its workings

3.5 On a final note the Chief Executive explained the rationale behind the theme 7 restructuring exercise of the agenda for change. He cited a number of motives which gave rise to the need for change:

- The need for the LSC to put its own house in order and set an example before expecting providers to do likewise.
- The need to get closer to local needs
- The need to be smarter and more focussed at a regional level
- The need for a different set of relationship skills at higher levels
He pointed out that the cost saving of £40m was an expected outcome of the restructuring and not a motivating factor. It was intended that the savings should be redirected to the LSCs priorities.

3.6 The Chair invited members to comment and ask any questions they had. Building on the previous presentation by Waqar, one member emphasised the need for the LSC to fully engage with two aspects:

- Embedding/mainstreaming of E&D throughout the business backed by strong leadership with real challenge and accountability
- Fully understanding the risks involved in radical and/or creative thinking and ensuring that adequate risk assessments are carried out to inform planning.

3.7 Further more specific comments from members included the following:

a. Concern that the restructuring process could hinder the continuity of work already started with championing E&D in the regions and local offices, and might demotivate staff or lead to a loss of direction. The Chief Executive accepted that agenda for change did involve having to make some difficult choices but that the organisation needed to have fewer and more focussed priorities in order to become more efficient. He was grateful for the input from the Committee members and welcomed their advice and guidance.

b. Members felt there was a need to have a specific reference in the Statement of Priorities about the Review of Learners with Learning difficulties and/or Disabilities, chaired by Peter Little. The Chief Executive noted the request and assured the Committee that there would be reference in the next Statement of Priorities. He added that there had been a deliberate decision not to single out specific E&D issues in the SoP, but to ensure that they were underpinning all the other priorities.

c. A point was raised about how the LSC need to shout more about its achievements and raise its profile and share what it does well.

d. The need for the LSC to be confident in having a feedback mechanism for straight talking with its partner organisations. When referring to “we” it should mean the whole system, embracing all partners and stakeholders.

e. It was noted that there were dangers in relying too heavily on prioritising as it could send unintended signals to other areas that they were non-priority, and ultimately lead to inappropriate perceptions.

f. There was encouragement from the DfES official for the LSC to adopt and promote the Civil Service 10 point Plan across the sector with the LSC taking the leadership role in driving the principles across its partners in the sector. There also needed to be effective communication of the valid reasons for agenda for change theme 7 restructuring.

g. One member expressed his continued concern that adult learners over 45 were generally not considered as priorities on a number of agendas. He wished to point out that rather than viewing the aging population as a crisis the sector should take a more positive view of what adult learners
could offer. It was suggested that there was a need to discuss the issue further with economic partners at the CBI and the DfES.

3.8 The Chair thanked those present for the discussion and Mark for his input. There were some useful ideas which would inform discussions later in the meeting.

**Item 4. SHM – Working with Muslim Groups – Presentation**

4.1 The Chair and members welcomed Maurice Biriotti and his colleague Rose Dowling of SHM to the meeting. Maurice gave a short presentation on the findings of a piece of research commissioned by the Committee on the learner engagement programme for young Muslims.

4.2 He described the brief for the research, how SHM had approached the brief and identified three key questions that need to be explored:

- How does the world look to these young people?
- What role does state education play in their lives?
- What are the implications for the LSC and education more widely?

4.3 Following the consultations and interviews with a number of differing groups of young muslims SHM noted some universal attitudes and beliefs:

- There is only one right route, go wrong and you go wrong for life therefore you must take advice from your elders to avoid going wrong.
- The right route starts and ends with the family who face the individual's challenges as a whole
- Education exists in two different sectors, religious or secular

4.4 SHM went on to highlight the questions raised by this work for the LSC scoping exercise.

4.5 Maurice also brought to the Committee's attention the findings from a series of interviews he had with people at all levels, whilst he was in Paris during the recent civil disturbances. He pointed out that whilst the cause of the rioting was nothing to do with specific Muslim issues, many of the people involved happened to be Muslim.

4.6 He had asked them the question, “Does being a Muslim make a difference?” and from their responses identified three key features:

- Rage
- Righteousness
- Recognition

4.7 Members congratulated SHM on an interesting and useful piece of research and then discussed the need to cascade these finding throughout the sector recommending that further similar research should be carried out with other groups of disengaged learners. SHM offered to provide members with the findings from a similar piece of research carried out with young Muslim women.

**Action: Clerk to contact SHM for survey results of Learner Engagement Programme with young Muslim women.**
4.8 Members also agreed the need to ensure that Government Ministers were aware of the findings of this research.

**Action:** Clerk to circulate SHM presentation with discussion notes  
**Action:** Paul Turner to refer findings to appropriate DfES officials

### Item 5. Reports from Subcommittees

5.1 As there were no substantial reports from the subcommittees the Chair moved to bring forward the more pressing item at agenda item 6, and bring up any subcommittee feedback at “Any other business”.

### Item 6. Ideas for Strategic Plan

6.1 The Chair opened the discussion by defining the Committee’s remit as to provide guidance for the executive at the LSC and by association its partners and stakeholders. She referred to Mark Haysom’s presentation earlier in the meeting and said she had been encouraged by the targeted approach being used by the executive at the current time. She invited members to contribute advice and comments on how the Committee could become more strategically focussed in order to provide the leadership with effective advice and guidance.

6.2 Members made a number of suggestions and comments as follows:

- The Committee should have input to all strategic LSC documents such as Annual Statement of Priorities.
- The National Equality and Diversity Strategy should reviewed periodically and developed with changing circumstances and as targets and work is achieved.
- The Committee should try to identify what the main Equality and Diversity issues are that impact on learning and skills and the work of the LSC and its partners.
- EDIMS were effective ways to focus the direction of the equality and diversity
- The Equality and diversity committee needed to have input into the planning taking place for the 2012 Olympic Games in London, as the implications for skilling the local workforce were far reaching. It was suggested that volunteer should be sought from the Committee to sit on the **LSC Olympic Planning Taskforce**?

**Action:** Clerk to canvass for volunteer to sit on Partnership Olympic Taskforce

- Formal guidance on the effectiveness of EDIMS and how to align them to the local plans should be drawn up in the form of a toolkit. It was agreed that the LSC representative from the strategic planning team should liaise with planning colleagues to draw up some guidance on EDIMS and how they apply at local and regional levels.

**Action:** Beverley Matthews to liaise with LSC strategic planning team

- A final comment was that there should be a complete review of the 2004/2007Equality and Diversity Strategy and an assessment made of
how much has been achieved. This would then inform the Committee about how to develop the strategy for future years.

Item 7. Report from Director of Equality and Diversity

7.1 The report was introduced by the Interim Director of Equality and Diversity, and contributions made by the Policy Manager.

7.2 Members spent some time discussing the need for a stocktake of activities undertaken by the subgroups so that the Committee could be clearer about where they could make a difference and on what issues.

7.3 Members were advised that the EDIMs subgroup had met prior to this meeting and had agreed that there should be a launch of national and regional EDIMS in May.

7.4 The Interim Director advised members that future Director reports would be mapped against the strands of the Equality and Diversity Strategy and will look to capture all LSC activity.

7.5 One member queried the reason for the strategic overview and urged members to consider what the review would hope to achieve and for whom:
   - Providers and learners
   - The LSC
   - To move the Equality and Diversity agenda forward.

7.6 Members noted the comment from the DfES that the DTI was better placed to send a paper on age legislation to the Committee but reiterated a request for a representative of the DfES legislative team to attend the next meeting of the Committee, to comment on the forthcoming legislation.

   Action: Clerk to invite DfES Age legislation representative to 17 May committee meeting.

7.7 The DfES observer commented on the need for the Committee to look at the implications of the reduction in the amount of European Social Fund to be allocated to the UK and the impact this might have on Equality and Diversity issues.

7.8 Members noted that there was a meeting of the Appointments Committee the following week when Equality and Diversity on Local Councils was on the agenda for discussion. It was agreed that it would be useful to the committee to receive feedback from that meeting.

Item 8. Minutes of previous meeting and matter arising

8.1 The minutes of the meeting on 27 November 2005 were agreed as a true record of discussions, with no matters arising.

Item 9. Any other business

9.1 The Chair invited the member involved in the Council sub group on planning to give a brief update to the Committee. The committee member had noted the following points:
   - There was still much work to be done to ensure that equality and diversity was firmly embedded in the local plans
• Many local plans did not contain a proper understanding of EDIMs
• One or two plans were excellent and could be used as exemplars for sharing good practice.

9.2 The member explained that as the local plans came forward for comments and initial approval, she would be able to give a further update on the extent to which Equality and Diversity was intrinsic within them.

9.3 Another member raised the issue of Corporate memory and continuity as the LSC undergoes the *agenda for change* process. He was concerned that the shedding of staff might affect the continuity of work being carried out, specifically with regard to Equality and Diversity champions. The Director for Learning assured members that the new regional structures would work to maintain the momentum of the LSC’s work.

**Item 10. Date of next meeting**
10.1 The next meeting of the Committee will take place on 15 March 2006, at Grosvenor Gardens, London.