Working together: five years on
A summary report

March 2009
Of interest to people and organisations involved in learning and skills
Further information
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Throughout this document, we write financial years as 2008–09 and academic years as 2008/09.
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When I wrote the foreword to the Working Together strategy in 2004, I knew that there was a great deal of work to be done to remove barriers to third sector engagement with the LSC and embed good practice in our everyday business.

Over the last five years, I have watched the relationship between the third sector and the LSC evolve to an impressive degree. That evolution has required tenacity of vision and mature debate. It has not always been easy, but it has been extremely worthwhile, as is shown by the examples set out in this document.

Both the LSC and the third sector are striving to put the individual at the heart of what they do and to deliver the highest quality of service to the people they work with. The LSC’s key aim is to open up new ways to enhance the services we provide to learners and potential learners at all levels by working in partnership with those who know best how to reach diverse groups. Through good communication, and by challenging each other’s thinking, I believe we are succeeding.

In times of economic difficulty, it is more important than ever that every individual is supported to develop the knowledge and skills they need to get, and keep, a job. As we look forward to the establishment of two new agencies to fund learning and skills, it is imperative that we record the good practice that has resulted from the implementation of the Working Together strategy, so that we can learn from it. This document represents an excellent first step.

I hope that you will find it an enjoyable and interesting read and that we can continue to work together, building on the good work done to date and ensuring a smooth transition to the new agencies in 2010.

Mark Haysom
Chief Executive
Learning and Skills Council
1 In 2004, the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) published *Working Together*, its strategy for working with the third sector. The strategy reflects the LSC’s commitment to partnership and its belief that collaboration can deliver significant mutual benefits.

2 It set out a number of key aims:

- to bring about a step-change in the LSC’s relations with the third sector;
- to open up access to mainstream LSC funding;
- to establish principles of partnership and mutual benefit;
- to extend best practice working arrangements across the LSC;
- to create a framework of minimum expectations; and
- to confirm the LSC’s commitment to implementing the 1998 Compact.

3 Five years on, the LSC and third sector organisations are working together at national, regional and local levels to turn these goals into a reality. This booklet provides a snapshot of that work. The full version, *Working together: five years on*, is available at [http://thirdsector.lsc.gov.uk](http://thirdsector.lsc.gov.uk).

**Why work together?**

4 Third sector organisations already work with many of the learners the LSC serves and seeks to serve, making them natural partners at local, regional and national levels. At the same time, there is clear scope for the LSC to help the third sector achieve its own broad aims of promoting social inclusion and enhancing life chances, including by developing learning opportunities for the third sector workforce, both paid and unpaid.
Building capacity nationally

5 The LSC is developing its capacity to work with the third sector at national level, underpinning the work being done regionally. It has appointed a national third sector champion and assigned a third sector lead to each region as well as local liaison officers.

6 Progress against the targets set out in Working Together is also being monitored nationally. In November 2008, the first comprehensive list of LSC/third sector contracts was published. This will form the basis for an assessment of the impact of third sector provision between 2005 and 2008. Two engagement update reports, published in 2006 and 2008, also provide a useful snapshot of progress and are available at http://thirdsector.lsc.gov.uk.

The LSC has worked with a focus group to develop a dedicated third sector microsite, which was launched in early 2009. See http://thirdsector.lsc.gov.uk.

Regular ‘lunch and learn’ sessions, leaflets and an e-toolkit keep all LSC staff up to date on third sector partners and their work.
Supporting learning and skills provision

One of the most effective ways to develop the capacity of third sector learning providers is to open up access to funding. The LSC has run a series of roadshows to raise awareness of funding opportunities and has replaced its old paper-based tender forms with an online system, which is quicker and simpler to use. Regional LSCs are encouraging third sector organisations to form consortia, enabling them to bid for a wider range of contracts, and tailoring tender specifications to reflect their unique strengths.

Working Together identified e-learning as a further priority area, calling on the LSC to support and promote third sector involvement. Since 2005, the LSC and the National Institute for Adult Continuing Education (NIACE) have been working to involve third sector partners in their e-learning initiative, which includes access to the e-Guides staff development programme, support to apply for e-learning grants, e-learning awareness-raising events and a one-to-one consultancy service.

The LSC and NIACE have set up a peer coaching programme where third sector coaches can support other third sector organisations to learn more about how they can work with the LSC. To date, 64 organisations have successfully bid for coaching.

LSC London has commissioned a training course aimed at demystifying the commissioning process and helping third sector organisations put together successful bids.

In 2007–08, the LSC awarded 43 contracts with a total value of £7.61 million directly to third sector organisations. Of these, 16 were first-time contracts.
Developing the workforce

9 The third sector workforce includes a high proportion of women, people from minority ethnic backgrounds and people with disabilities or long-term health problems, so workforce development offers significant opportunities for widening participation and promoting equality. Workforce development will also further boost the third sector’s ability to deliver high-quality learning.

10 Train to Gain is a national service that supports training and skills development opportunities in the workplace. Increasingly, the LSC is using skills brokers and third sector intermediaries to build strong relationships with the third sector and to promote the benefits of the scheme. The LSC is also looking for ways to increase the number of Apprenticeships in the third sector and to attract more apprentices from diverse backgrounds.

A team of advisers in the South East has been awarded £170,000 to act as a ‘bridge’ between the LSC, skills brokers and the third sector. The team aims to engage 1,000 volunteers in Train to Gain by spring 2009.

LSC East of England is supporting around 80 third sector staff to gain certificates and diplomas in lifelong learning.

In the East Midlands, a third sector consortium led by Enable has won a £480,000 contract to develop an Apprenticeships pathway across the region and is now working with third sector organisations to ensure it reflects their needs.
Communication and sharing expertise

11 Every LSC region now has a regional lead responsible for promoting the third sector and ensuring good two-way communication, and a number of local LSC office champions. In some areas, local and regional Compacts that bring together LSC and third sector representatives are helping to establish agreed principles and consistent ways of working.

12 Local LSCs are building relationships with third sector organisations both directly and through intermediaries (such as regional forums and advisory groups). The direct contact is helping the LSC tap into relationships with hard-to-reach audiences, and leading to new ways of working. Dedicated LSC liaison posts are being created within the third sector, and LSC staff are joining third sector boards and management committees.

Secondments between the LSC and the third sector are giving staff valuable insights into each other’s ways of working and bridging the cultural gap.

LSC Yorkshire and the Humber has appointed a development officer for workforce and skills with a remit to develop and promote partnerships with the third sector, and to encourage open dialogue and effective communication.
Bringing the Compact to life

The Compact on Relations between Government and the Voluntary and Community Sector in England was established in 1998 to strengthen links between the Government and the third sector and to provide a practical framework for joint working towards shared objectives. 'Bringing the Compact to life' is a priority for all local LSCs. In practice, this includes making the Compact a standing agenda item, running Compact awareness sessions and setting up dedicated Compact groups.

LSC North West has set up a dedicated Compact group. As a result, new procurement arrangements are in place and the third sector is actively involved in developing tender specifications.

LSC North East is working with third sector partners to create a code setting out new ways of working, covering funding, commissioning and procurement, and design and delivery.
Planning and consultation

14 Local LSCs are involving third sector partners and potential partners in planning and consultation at all levels and at every stage, from strategy to development to implementation. In the North West, third sector organisations have taken part in a broad consultation on the region’s European Social Fund (ESF) finance plan. As a result of their input, the revised plan puts greater emphasis on the importance of black and minority ethnic groups. The minimum contract size has been reduced in the hope of attracting more bids from smaller organisations, and contract periods have been extended to up to three years.

LSC London has worked with third sector organisations from the start of its Skills for Jobs programme, tapping into their knowledge and experience to develop targeted support to get disadvantaged people into work.
Next steps

15 In 2010, the LSC will be replaced by two new agencies, the Skills Funding Agency (SFA) and the Young People’s Learning Agency (YPLA), which will address the needs of adults and young people respectively. The LSC is working locally, regionally and nationally to ensure that lessons learned and good practice are passed on to its successors, and that third sector partners are fully involved in planning and preparation.

16 In December 2008, the LSC convened a meeting of third sector infrastructure organisations and invited speakers from the Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills (DIUS) and the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF). This is the first in a series of conversations between the departments and the third sector which will be expanded to include the new agencies.

17 The second meeting will take place in London on 17 March 2009, at which Kevin Brennan, the Minister for the Third Sector, will launch this document as part of the legacy of the engagements between the LSC and the third sector.

Find out more

18 For more information about how the LSC is working with third sector partners, and to download the full version of this report, go to http://thirdsector.lsc.gov.uk.