7 March 2008

Dear Colleague

THE SEPTEMBER GUARANTEE

I wanted to write to thank you and congratulate you for your support on the implementation of the September Guarantee.

As you will know, the Guarantee was that, by the end of September 2007, every 16-year-old who wished to stay in learning would have received an offer of a suitable place. This was the first time that the Guarantee was to apply throughout England. Inevitably, some young people refused an offer, or were not in a position to accept an offer at that time (5% of the cohort), and a small number were no longer at the address recorded by Connexions and could not be contacted (2% of the cohort). For only a small number of young people in the total year group (8,000 out of 622,000) was no offer made, some of whom had applied but had been rejected or were awaiting the result of an application.

This is a magnificent effort in the first year of such an initiative, and reflects great credit on the joint working of Local Authorities, Connexions, FE providers and, I am pleased to say, the LSC. This was also the first year in which an on-line prospectus of learning opportunities was available covering the whole of England, and we are confident that these two initiatives will result in a substantial fall in the number of 16-18 year olds recorded as not in education, employment or training (NEET). Indeed, the Labour Force Survey (LSF) data for the final quarter of 2007 show a 1.6 percentage point decrease in the percentage of 16 year olds NEET.

That is why it is so pleasing to see that we now have the highest level ever of young people staying in learning and achieving. The target for 2008 to have more 16 year-olds achieving a Level 2 and more 19 year-olds achieving a Level 3, has been surpassed a year early. For everyone working in and involved with the LSC and right across Further Education, these positive results reflect all the work that goes on every single day to build better lives through better learning and skills. The Guarantee is working.

However, you will not be surprised that we now want to raise the bar for 2008. First, whilst the proportion of 16 year olds NEET is falling, the latest LFS figures show an increase in the proportion of 17 year olds NEET. Ministers have therefore requested that the Guarantee in 2008 is extended to cover all 16 and 17 year olds. The Department for Children, Schools and Families has recently published guidance on the implementation of the Guarantee this year, which is available at:

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http://www.dfes.gov.uk/14-19/index.cfm?sid=42. Secondly, the offer of a place in learning is worthless if the young person does not actually enrol, or leaves before completing, which is why I wrote in June 2007 to advise you that it would be a condition of funding that providers inform Connexions as soon as possible if a young person does not enrol for a place they have accepted, or if they leave before completing. I know that most of you already do that as a matter of course, but as the responsibility for the Connexions Service will, by April, have transferred to local authorities, it may be helpful to review the arrangements you have in place for sharing data, in particular about offers you have made.

The LSC looks forward to working with you and other schools, colleges and providers, with Local Authorities and with Connexions services to make an even greater success of the Guarantee this year – so that even more young people have the chance to fulfil their potential.

I am also pleased to let you all know that Rob Wye, whom many of you will know, is now our National Director for Young People’s Learning and Skills. Rob will be taking the LSC lead on all 14-19 matters, on working with DCSF and Local Authorities, and on the transition of funding under the Machinery of Government changes. And, of course, the new September Guarantee!

Yours sincerely

Mark Haysom
Chief Executive
(Agreed by and electronically signed in his absence)