# Bureaucracy Reduction Group Meeting – LSC National Office – 4 March 2009

**Present**

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<tr>
<td>Tony Craven (Chair), Susan Rogers (DIUS), Debbie Watson (LSC), Martin Jones (Guildford College), Dan Taubman (UCU), Pauline Sparkes representing Isabel Nisbet (Ofqual), Robert Russell representing Julian Gravatt (AoC), Marcia Twelftree (IRU), Elizabeth Bray (West Suffolk), David Prescod representing Ann Hughes (Becta), Paul O’Shea (St Charles College) Jos Parsons (Ofsted), Ian Wilson (LSIS), Nick Johnson representing Paul Phillips (Weston College), Rosemary Varley representing Nadine Cartner (AMiE), Jane Earl (UKCES), Gerard McAlea (DCSF), Pietro Bonamio representing Peter Roberts (Stockport College), Sarah Battarbee (DCSF), Jagvir Banning (LSC), Elizabeth McCann (LSC)</td>
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**In attendance**

- Ian Pursglove (LSC)
- Barbara Clark (LSC)
- Paul Martinez (LSC)
- Natasha Atkinson (LSC)
- Nazma Chowdhury and Natasha Parker (Stockport College)

**Apologies**

- Isabel Nisbet (Ofqual)
- Julian Gravatt (AoC)
- Una Bennett (IA)
- Bobbie McClelland (DIUS)
- Mark Novels (QCA)
- Derek Bodey (St Brendan’s Sixth Form College)
- Paul Phillips (Weston College)
- David Russell, (LSC)
- Peter Roberts (Stockport College)
- Frank McMahon (YH Group)
- Nadine Cartner (ACM)

## AGENDA ITEM 1 – Welcome and Introductions

1.1 The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting and apologies were noted. Particular thanks were given to 2 learners from Stockport College, Nazma Chowdhury and Natasha Parker who were asked to attend for Learner Support scrutiny (item 3).

## AGENDA ITEM 2 – Minutes of last meeting (16 January) and matters arising

2.1 Following a change to reflect that Pam Eaton from Guildford College had attended and not Martin Jones, the minutes were approved as a true record.

2.2 Actions were carried out and the following matters noted:
- Actions following Train to Gain and QCF scrutinies had been incorporated in the LSC simplification plan
- SR fed back from BM that she was no longer responsible for MIAP and the query with regard to NI numbers being used as a proxy for adults when setting up ULN should be followed up with Barbara Clark.
- SFA presentation, all other January meeting papers and future BRG meeting dates have been added to the BRG website.
- Paul Martinez attending for item 5a – Update on Framework for Excellence.
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<th>Action</th>
<th>Follow up Ni number being used as a proxy when setting up ULN with Barbara Clark</th>
<th>Jagvir Banning</th>
<th>March 2009</th>
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**AGENDA ITEM 2a – Arrangements for BRG/Chair for the coming year – Bobbie McClelland**

SR fed back to the group as BM had to attend another meeting. The group were updated on the recent restructuring at DIUS:

- There is a directorate headed up by Susan Pember looking at shadow Skills Funding Agency, funding and links to sponsorship with LSC.
- HE and FE Skills
- NAS
- Business and Innovation
- Science

Secretary of State formal agreement to the BRG and its’ chair are still awaited, in the meantime, TC’s chairmanship would continue into April. SR will confirm to the group when formal agreement has been received. SR informed of DIUS commitment to the role of the BRG as the ‘sectors watchdog’ and how highly it is valued. Stronger links with DCSF need to be explored. TC hopes to make progress with this following a meeting with David McVean.

It was agreed that the focus of the BRG April meeting should be the Apprenticeships, Skills, Children and Learning Bill 2008-09.

**AGENDA ITEM 2b – BRG links with National Learner Panel**

The main meeting of the NLP is due to take place on 20th March. The group agreed that it would be useful if BRG fed into discussions at NLP and any key issues it would like raising at the meeting. DT confirmed his interest in attending a future meeting of the NLP.

**AGENDA ITEM 3 – Scrutiny – Learner Support**

3.1 The background paper for this item is available [here](#). The group discussed possible areas for further investigation during the Scrutiny with Ian Pursglove, Young People’s Support Programmes Director.

3.2 The scrutiny centred on the systems in place for the allocation and distribution of Young Leaner Support Funds, with the following put to the Director:

- Recognition that since Capita reclaimed the system, improvements had been made but still a strong feeling that the system was not as good as last year.
- The manual input of reference numbers by administrators which led to errors
- Capacity of the system leading to payments being made late to students
- From the learners perspective, the struggle to make contact via the automated system in September/October
- What is the assessment process for determining the level of funding?
- Questions re funding ring-fencing rules
• Queries re additional bureaucracy caused by ad hoc operation changes
• Poor communications between the LSC, the contractor and providers on operational matters.

In the Director’s response to the above he said that he would be happy to involve the group with commenting on the content of planned future Guidance Notes. He confirmed that the Advisory Group although still in existence it had not met in 8 months. The following was highlighted:

• Virement between different funding streams is a central government issue and not something that the LSC can control
• Communications regarding the Christmas payment to learners was issued late and the decision to pay learners when they did was taken as a result of improving stability of the system enabling payments to be made before Christmas
• Some of the problems with the previous contractor had been that the helpline did not have access to the database, this was addressed immediately by Capita
• In an effort to reduce bureaucracy in income assessment the same system is used as operated by HMRC. Ministers are of the view the system is best if kept simple. The group agreed that a slight increase in bureaucracy is acceptable if it promotes fairness of the system. This could be raised with Treasury, but would involve a fundamental change to how government assess funding.
• The reasons for not being able to use ULN are set out in the background paper. Issues are around working with all partners different systems and creating an interface to match. From the learner point of view there is a move to online records which will reduce the burden of paperwork.
• In process of building payment system for September – single portal but because information is being exchanged this must be built in a secure and robust way.

The Director agreed to consider the suggestions put forward by the group and identify any for action which when agreed would be inserted into the LSC simplification plan and monitored at future BRG meetings.

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**AGENDA ITEM 4 – Information Awareness**

4a. UKCES – Jane Earl

Jane Earl, Director of Simplification presented to the group (*Simplification – how complex can it be*) on the project being implemented by UKCES to simplify the Skills System, particularly within Train to Gain and Apprenticeship frameworks. It was agreed that the BRG could be of use to UKCES through general promotion and advocacy of simplification as well as monitoring of simplification actions.

4b. Managing Information Across Providers – Barbara Clark

Barbara Clark presented to the group. Members were told about the benefits to learners and providers that flow from the systems either currently or in development through MIAP. Agency and departmental members were urged to ensure the use of MIAP services were an integral part of their own simplification plans and individual system developments.

4c. Apprenticeships, Skills, Children and Learning Bill 2008-09 – Gerard McAlea

Gerard McAlea briefed members on the above. The Chair informed of a joint DCSF/DIUS meeting held last July and suggested that the BRG sponsor
a similar meeting to explore the implications of the proposed changes in the machinery of government. GA stated he would talk to DIUS colleagues and TC informed he would be meeting with David McVean (Deputy Director DCSF)

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<th>AGENDA ITEM 5 – Simplification Plan and Action Plan Monitoring</th>
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<td>5a. Update on Framework for Excellence – Paul Martinez</td>
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<td>Paul Martinez informed members on actions taken following the scrutiny to simplify the framework. Major structural changes had been agreed which included removing overall performance rating and instead adopting a more general and specific indicator model, relevant to any type of FE institution. Ministers are still considering overall performance indicators. Members were asked to consider whether the proposed changes were moving in the right direction and to comment on the proposed core indicators. Members commented they would like to have seen something on Workforce and Community Cohesion. Members stated that providers should not be asked to submit data over and above that already provided. PM was grateful to members for their comments and would integrate into systems already in place.</td>
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<th>5b. Exception Reports</th>
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<td>DW talked through the LSC Exception Report confirming the actions agreed following the scrutinies of QCF and Train to Gain. The agreed actions have been incorporated into the simplification plan.</td>
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<td>Ian Wilson confirmed that a formal simplification plan for LSIS should be available in July and was likely to use the methodology developed by BECTA.</td>
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<td>Progress as expected at this stage. Six monthly reviews should take place at the next meeting. The March meeting of the National Learner Panel will include an item on bureaucratic complexity within the FE and Training sector from a learner perspective.</td>
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<td>All progress as expected at this stage. It was hoped that the joint meeting planned for the near future would be able highlight those areas of the plan relevant to the change in the machinery of government of the FE and Training sector which were successful or giving cause for concern.</td>
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<td>Progress as expected at this stage</td>
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<td>The plan from BECTA is in progress and is expected to be available for the June meeting. A methodology for the production of Simplification Plans</td>
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has been developed and BECTA will share at the April meeting.

QCA

QCA were not represented at the meeting.

Ofqual

Progress was reported as expected at this stage. The plan will be updated again in April.

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<th>AGENDA ITEM 6 – BRG Matters</th>
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Elizabeth Bray reported on a recent event held which was attempting to improve and simplify provider generated bureaucracy. A regional meeting of providers had taken place which had focussed on how providers had responded to bureaucratic issues within Train to Gain and Apprenticeships in their region. Attendees shared good practice, locally developed templates and discussed other ideas.

Members agreed that this was a new aspect of the work of the BRG, and could be taken forward through further regional meetings and possibly through a forum on the BRG website. DW questioned the functionality of the BRG website to be able to do this.

PS informed that QCA were producing a joint document about reducing bureaucracy in awarding bodies which would be completed by the end of March and would send to the Chair.