Date: 12 September 2007
Subject: Equality and Diversity
Location: Holiday Inn Bloomsbury
Time: 09:30
LSC office: National Office
Publication intent: Internal

Present:
Shirley Cramer
Nicola Dandridge
Patrick Grattan
Amir Kabal
Peter Lavender
Alyson Malach
Jeremy Crook
Sally McEnhill
David Barker

In attendance:
Paul Turner
Simon Lindsay (for Item 6 only)
Richard Brannen (for Item 6 only)
Steve Ward (for Item 7 only)
Liz Burdett (for Item 7 only)

LSC staff:
Lee Probert
Pete Sanders

Apologies:
Apologies have been received from:
Judith Norrington

Item 1. Welcome and Introductions
1.1 The Chair welcomed the Committee and noted the apologies. Members were thanked for their attendance at the celebration dinner last night, which was a great success.

Item 2. Minutes
2.1 The minutes were approved without amendment.
Item 3. Matters Arising

3.1 Item 1.3 – Drafting for the grant letter is in the early stages, Paul Turner has been asked to contribute headlines for the equality and diversity section, and has in turn approached Lee Probert to collaborate. There are no guarantees that contributions will make the final letter which is normally 5 or 6 pages; the equality and diversity section is likely to only be three sentences.

It should be noted that priorities in previous grant letters continue to be priorities until a subsequent grant letter categorically states otherwise. Furthermore, issues which are not included in the grant letter are still issues and will be addressed.

There is a gap in funding at the moment in learners with disabilities aged 16-25 in mainstream education. Sally McEnhill should provide a few words to Paul Turner; however this is a wider issue for the LSC.

It appears that the Neighbourhood Learning in Deprived Communities Grant may not continue in future, however this was safeguarded only a few years ago. There needs to be a balance between accredited and non-accredited learning. Any statement in the grant letter on First Steps in Learning would be extremely beneficial to the LSC agenda and social cohesion.

The grant letter is only a steer and cannot include everything. A conversation has already been had with David Lammy to highlight many of the issues to him.

Action: Paul Turner will share the grant letter production timetable with Lee Probert. Committee members are invited to contribute items for the Letter to Lee Probert.

3.2 Item 8.2 – It was noted that the training being devised by the LSC for Impact Assessment needed wider dispersal. This would be a useful tool to share across the sector.

The framework is currently with the LSC legal team; Melanie Hunt’s recent move to OfSTED will ensure the LSC approach is adopted there. The framework will be published and offered out across the sector but it will not be billed as the only solution. Organisations must work through the framework themselves to identify their priorities; this must be a learning process not a form filling exercise.

Item 4. Annual Statement of Priorities.

4.1 Lee Probert talked through the presentation prepared by Clare Boden who was unable to attend.

4.2 Normally the Annual Statement of Priorities looks at the next three years, this year, given the current climate and changes to the Machinery of Government (MoG) the statement focuses on the next 12 months only.

4.3 The statement is less prescriptive than last year and the targets contain no surprises. It should be noted that Gordon Brown is very keen on apprenticeships and a review has been commissioned. Equality and diversity will form a large part of that review.
4.4 There are three priorities this year not six; this is not however a reduction as all the work will be continuing, this is simply a repackaging of the statements. This is partly to ensure that the transformation of the FE sector does not result in over-complication.

4.5 The members felt that there is no cohesion between the LSC priorities and those of LEAs and DCSF, whilst the statement is an excellent document it is unclear which plan takes precedent. The document is being discussed at the Director Conference later today where representatives from both departments will be present. The current message is that the LSC is responsible for the next three years, but LEAs will be given increasingly more input as time goes on.

4.6 Members’ reported a suspicion that a worrying trend is emerging where some colleges are withdrawing learners from A2 classes because they did not gain the top grades at AS-level which would help boost the college’s position in the A-level league tables. The students are still capable of passing the examinations and progressing to university but are not being given the opportunity at their current college, these learners are having to find alternative colleges for their final year which is disruptive to their education.

**Action:** Sally McEnhill will report back with approximate numbers of learners affected after enrolment is complete.

**Action:** Rob Wye should be invited to a future meeting to discuss 14-19 transition and the 19+ agenda.

4.7 In the first priority, the word ‘diversity’ should be inserted after ‘raise demand’. It is good to see social justice included in the second priority.

4.8 The key message on equality and diversity to be included in the statement of priorities will flow from the grant letter therefore the Committee must focus its attention on getting the right wording into the letter.

4.9 There will be a key drive to tackle the NEET issue, and get a definitive answer on who makes up that group. The word ‘employability’ should be included; Apprenticeships rely on employers taking on students. Employability training is needed to get onto apprenticeships, and into jobs. It is currently very difficult for people with a level 2 qualification to get their first job which is increasing the size of the NEET group. There is no incentive for these learners to continue in education if there is no indication a job will follow afterwards.

4.10 Members’ suggested the review of the national strategy (Learning for Living and Work) has been hampered this year by such major staff changes throughout the LSC. The Chair has already written to Chris Banks expressing her concern.

4.11 The shortfall in part-time provision will be independently researched in the near future. The transition points in education are also of particular concern.

4.12 The importance of faith should be mentioned in the statement of priorities. There is also no mention of mental health.

4.13 The increased importance of fees is in conflict with the Skills for Life agenda which provides a free first level 2 qualification. Employers will not pay for courses they can get free, nor are they likely to fund further qualifications.
4.14 Spatial intervention is not a term that is widely understood and should be clarified.

4.15 Learner voice has been overlooked; there is no mechanism of listening to learners and potential learners to understand their needs. This is critical to the success of delivering the demand-led approach set out by Leitch.

4.16 This Committee has already expressed serious concerns with the train to gain programme in terms of equality and diversity measures. It is likely that an EDIM will be developed to give the programme a target to work towards but it is difficult to determine the consequences of not hitting an EDIM target. At first sight there doesn’t appear to be any repercussions, although it does allow a conversation to be had on why targets were not met.

4.17 The sections on employers and adults appears to stop at level 2, this appears inconsistent with the earlier message that level 3 will now become the focus.

4.18 London needs to be considered as a unique case, the region has 54 LEAs which add complexity, as does the influence of the Mayor. Manchester with 10 LEAs could also benefit from special consideration and recognition that they do not fit with the rest of the country.

4.19 It feels like the Committee are conducting an impact assessment on this document, Clare Boden is conducting research into the full impact and the Committee should be given the opportunity to feed into that.

4.20 The meaning and sustainability of community cohesion needs to be carefully considered. Local can become a boundary and not every provider can meet every need therefore collaborative working will be necessary, often across these local borders.

4.21 The current procurement exercise is prohibitive to voluntary sector organisations. Whilst much of this is due to European directives the LSC’s own processes – where possible – should be less prescriptive. Simplification however should not result in the loss of rigour.

**Action:** Any further concerns members have regarding the Annual Statement of Priorities should be fed back to Lee Probert. Issues will be collated and fed back to Clare Boden, Shirley Cramer will also feedback to the National Council.

**Item 5. Update on Muslim Research**

**Action:** Lee Probert will send the discussion paper to members for comments and the item will be discussed at the November meeting.

**Item 6. Director’s Report**

6.1 Committee members are invited to e-mail Lee Probert with any comments.

**Item 7. Equality and Diversity in the North East Region**

7.1 The Chair welcomed the team from the North West, who talked through their presentation.
7.2 The region is subject to both long term gradual changes and significant change on a much more rapid scale. The population is almost stagnant and increasingly aging as young people are migrating from the area.

7.3 Taken as a region the Black and Ethnic Minority community account for 2.4% of the population, however on a local scale this varies from 1.0% in Northumberland and Durham to 6.9% in Newcastle.

7.4 Below level 2 literacy and numeracy are higher than national averages, as is the percentage of the population who are economically active. Additionally unemployment is higher than national averages and the disabled population is currently at 23.9%, significantly higher than national averages.

7.5 The Equality and Diversity plan has been drawn up in consultation with several partners and links in with other key plans in the region, including the Regional Economic Strategy, the Regional Commissioning Plan and the ONE North East Equality and Diversity Strategic Action Plan. It should also be noted that David Barker co-chairs the LSC North East Equality and Diversity Steering Group who have helped draw up this plan.

7.6 The region has matched their data against national priorities which have been discussed at regional and national level. From this five priority EDIMs have been drawn up from a total of 12. Whilst all 12 are important to work towards, the 5 identified will be the main focus.

7.7 One person in each partnership team has been given the lead for equality and diversity. The leads all meet to share good practice. This is overseen to ensure the Regional Skills Teams are doing the work they have agreed to undertake.

7.8 External Partnerships go beyond just involving the RDA. Several smaller but key bodies have been approached, including a refugee network and CEHR.

7.9 Funding is available to address the EDIMs projects identified, particularly around investigating the issue of BME learners being less likely to be learning at level 2 or above. So far £120,000 has been set aside for key projects; this is based on the recommendations made by the steering group.

7.10 The Chair thanked the team for the presentation, which gives a real flavour of the work being done in the region.

7.11 The EDIMs use success rates as the measure; this is to link in with PSA targets which are all based on success rates.

7.12 There is a need to engage people who are not already engaged. The EDIMs focus on the key areas, such as apprenticeships, as this is where the biggest difference can be made at the moment. Work is being done to increase engagement. The Regional Employability Framework will help, as will the New Pathways to Work initiative being launched in December. One of the problems in the region is the high numbers of people on incapacity benefit; people are very protective of this and do not want to risk losing it by engaging in learning or work.

7.13 It seems that many adults are engaged in IT and craft-based subjects, which traditionally learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities have less success at.
7.14 EDIMs are not targets; gap analysis is hard enough at the best of times, however with frequently changing baselines, methodologies for measuring and incentives this is even more difficult. Partner bodies are instructed to challenge the regional LSC if they feel more work can be done. There is a commitment to report back to the Committee on the progress made towards the EDIMs to continue the dialogue on the ongoing work.

**Action:** The Committee were asked to pass any further questions to Lee Probert to collate and send to the regional team.

**Item 8. Equality and Diversity in the Yorkshire and The Humber region.**

8.1 The team were welcomed to the Committee, during their presentation the following points were raised:

8.2 The regional team is focussed and enthusiastic on delivering the equality and diversity agenda. The region covers a large geographical area and has considerable local differences.

8.3 Non-white communities account for 11.4% of the regional population. This varies locally from 0.7% in Selby to 21.7% in Bradford, of which 14.5% are Pakistani. 52% of Local Authorities are in the upper quartile of the most deprived in the country.

8.4 National PSA targets have highlighted where the gaps are; across the board there is 3% less achievement in the region as a whole, however this is much greater at Level 2.

8.5 There is a significant NEET group, 10% of young people are in this group, however this increases to 16% of young BME people, and to 27% of young disabled people, however this may not be a true figure as many young disabled people do not declare their disabilities.

8.6 The EDIMs are drawn up from National PSA targets and National EDIMs. There is a big push nationally for apprenticeships; it must be ensured that all cohorts are included in this drive.

8.7 With such diversity, providers are being targeted individually to provide tailored solutions, rather than using a broad-brush approach which would not be fit for purpose.

8.8 A Regional Equality and Diversity Steering Group has been set up to promote the equality and diversity agenda and monitor the impact. This provides partnership teams with the data and understanding of key issues which they should be discussing with providers.

8.9 Research is currently underway to understand gang-culture. It aims to identify key issues and use peer working to education young people about the dangers.

8.10 Football is being used to attract potential learners onto college premises, once within the college grounds advertising and course information is then used to promote literacy and numeracy programmes. This is aiming to overcome the hurdles to getting people into education.

8.11 A pilot scheme is already underway for learners with learning difficulties and or disabilities to live and learn in specialist accommodation. A three-bedroom
flat has already been set up and many organisations are working together to provide all aspects of their life and learning needs. This includes their social and leisure activities. This scheme allows learners to stay in their home town rather than being sent to expensive residential colleges away from family and friends.

8.12 Future activities will look at breaking down further barriers, such as women participating in higher level qualifications and vocational learning. The business benefits of a diverse workplace, which include increased productivity, are being broadcast to local industry.

8.13 Breaking the cycle of the high NEET group leading to lack of investment from businesses, which restricts the number of available jobs and therefore increasing the NEET population will also be a key future initiative. An initiative in Humberside is adopting a new approach by asking the voluntary sector what is needed, how to target potential learners and what funding is necessary. So far £4.4million has been set aside for this.

8.14 The mental health awareness booklet was published last year; the region now wants to target specific areas of this particularly around the BME communities.

8.15 Getting women and members of the BME community onto apprenticeships should be a priority. The region must identify employers who can help with this and ensure learners have the skills to get on the course. The BME Network that Jeremy Crook is involved will be able to help. The match-funding from the European Social Fund is being lost and many providers are having to withdraw from key initiatives and adult provision.

8.16 The term non-white is far too general and must be broken down into more meaningful categories.

8.17 The Chair thanked the Regional team for the presentation.

**Action:** The Committee were asked to pass any further questions to Lee Probert to collate and send to the regional team.

8.18 The Committee considered the possibility of reviewing all regional action plans so that good practice can be shared. This would however be a time consuming exercise and given the short shelf-life of the LSC the Committee should look at faster ways to push the agenda as far as possible and as quickly as possible in order to raise the bar for the organisations who will take on the work of the LSC.

8.19 OfSTED need to measure EDIMs and the progress towards them as part of their inspections. This is the only way to truly imbed the principles.

8.20 The Employment and Skills Commission will be taking over the remit of the SSDA. The Committee should bear these provider led networks in mind as they may be a useful partner.

8.21 The presentations highlighted the difference between the regions in terms of progress to date and the ways forward. The Committee needs to be more of a critical friend to the region. A review of the first year of the single equality scheme would be more productive than reviewing action plans. Linking individual members to the each of the regions has been suggested before and is likely to happen later this year.
Item 9. Terms of Reference

9.1 Members are invited to e-mail Lee Probert with any comments.

Meeting chair  Shirley Cramer
Minute taker    Pete Sanders
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